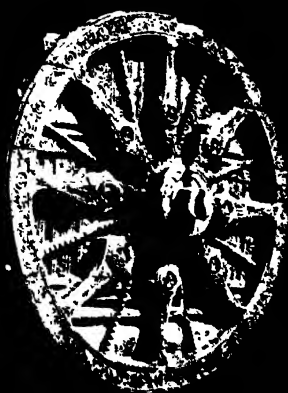


**WISDOM
OF
CULTURAL
HERITAGE
OF
INDIA**



VIVEK BHATTACHARYA

WISDOM OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

by

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Foreword by

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Dedicated with affectionate regards

TO

SMT. KAMLA GUPTA

a silent patron of Indian Culture
and Literature for her constant
encouragement to my
research projects



ऊर्जा मंत्री
भारत
नई दिल्ली-११०००१
MINISTER OF ENERGY
INDIA
NEW DELHI-110001

FOREWORD

I was glad to know that Dr. Vivek Ranjan Bhattacharya, with whose literary achievements I have had the pleasure to be familiar for the last fifteen years, has kept his promise by writing a handy book entitled WISDOM OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA.

I have had the pleasure of discussing the Synopsis with him immediately after he wrote the book TAGORE'S VISION OF A GLOBAL FAMILY.

Dr. Bhattacharya's marathon book on *one hundred and ten Saints of India* had impressed me and I enjoyed reading his book on *ROLE OF INDIRA GANDHI IN WORLD PEACE*. They are always written in a simple and lucid style. His book on *TOWARDS NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND UNITY OF INDIA* served a very useful purpose as also his book on India's freedom movement : *INDIA AWAKENED: A TRYST WITH DESTINY*. I discussed with him all the books even before he completed them and gave him many suggestions because I found here a sincere research scholar working silently behind the scene some concrete valuable piece of literary works which would go a long way in shaping the character of the next generation.

In this book WISDOM OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA Dr. Bhattacharya has described the salient features not only of the *Vedas, Upanisads, Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Purana,*

the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, *Jainism*, *Buddhism*, *Sikhism*, *Islam*, *Christianity*, *Zoroastrianism* which reflect the true unique immortal characteristic of Indian culture—unity in diversity. This will certainly help our next generation to know each other better and create a better mutual cordial relationship. Indian civilisation is the most ancient and yet the most modern of all the civilisations. Where as great ancient civilisations like that of Greece, Egypt, Rome have gone into the background, Indian civilisation is most lively and still commanding the same power as in the past. The main reason is her tremendous power of assimilation. India believed in accepting the best of all—never opposing against any faith as an alien. She has the largest number of religions co-existing peacefully with great homogeneity. That is the secret of the success of our ancient culture which our next generation must know about most proudly. This is our most proud possession. I wish Dr. Bhattacharya all the best.

(Vasant Sathe)

INTRODUCTION

The Book "*Wisdom of Cultural Heritage of India*" is an earnest attempt to apprise especially the youth of present generation about our rich cultural heritage. While many of our intellectual and highly intelligent students in different fields of specialisation, particularly in Science, Engineering or Medicinal fields know much about the background of many things in the world, it is highly unfortunate that they are sometimes totally ignorant about themselves.

Rich heritage means the good family background from which you hail. It is a matter of pride for every Indian to belong to a rich civilisation which is also one of the oldest. In this Book, only the salient aspects of some of the major philosophical treatises have been described. The opening Chapter gives a brief description of the wisdom and concept of cultural heritage of India. It is a vast subject and would require extensive studies in depth. In fact, there are volumes of books written on this subject by scholars and historians. The main purpose of this book is to provide the general readers with a panoramic view as well as an authentic account of the cultural heritage of India.

The *Vedas* form the second Chapter of the book. Prof. Max Mueller, the great Indologist, has already done full justice on the subject. It was his discovery of this great

ancient literature of India which has thrown new light on this ancient treasure. There is need for a more detailed and analytical study and for the benefit of the students and readers a number of references have been given at the end of each Chapter.

The Third Chapter deals with the most sacred and the quintessence of Indian civilisation, as reflected in the *Upanishads*. There were 110 *Upanishads* and each one of them derived its origin from the *Vedas*. They were not properly arranged. In those days it was not the practice of the teachers to commit everything to writing or leave manuscripts to the students. They had to depend on *Shruti* which meant to learn from ear to ear and in those days there were no use also of paper manuscripts. The manuscripts were only later introduced by Palm leaves but the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* were handed down to the students, to a limited number of students, who had the good fortune of having good preceptors and who themselves led a life of *Brahmacharis* or strict celibacy. It was restricted only to *Brahmins*. The *Upanishads* were arranged and properly edited by Bhagawan Shankaracharya who selected only 10 out of the 110 *Upanishads*. These 10 are today accepted as the core of all *Upanishads* and they have been translated not only in Indian languages but in almost all important languages of the world including English, French, Spanish, German, Latin, Persian, and many other European languages.

Out of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* emerged philosophical treatises, most sacred and respected by the Indians in general and the world at large. This was none other than *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. There are hundreds of commentaries on *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* including one by Bhagwan Shankaracharya. There are a number of other commentaries by other saintly scholars. In the chapter dealing with this subject an attempt has been made to give an outline and message of it, viz. renunciation, which is the supreme message of Indian culture. There is a chapter included which it is felt necessary to cover the influence of these three great religious scriptures

on Indian life and literature. These have tremendous Indian and culture. A dissertative analysis of these can be a great tool for any student who attempts a Doctorate Thesis on the subject.

The two great epics of India which can lay claim to be part of the Indian history of human civilisation, viz. the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are dealt with in two separate chapters. They have been described only very briefly and in synoptic outlines. I feel, they would require further studies. The glimpses, as reflected in the two chapters would give to the general students, especially of the present generation, an insight into our rich and ancient cultural heritage.

Tirrukural written originally in Tamil is the most ancient literature giving moral, ethical and socio-economic sermons in the form of aphorisms. These are avidly read and followed till this day. Since it was not widely circulated, which it richly deserved, not many modern students, even most brilliant ones have heard much about it. If one reads the translation of *Tirrukural* and quite a number of them are available now, one will be amazed to find how these ideas of thousands of years ago are still relevant and valid. It also portrayed how the learned scholar anticipated the problems and the concern for Indian peasants, and people living in urban and rural areas. They have relevance even for modern days.

Jainism is perhaps more ancient than even the Hindu religion because there is reference even in the *Rig Veda* of the first *Tirthankara*, the roaming monk who would be spreading the message of love, brotherhood and non-violence. The greatest contribution of Jain philosophy was reflected in the message of love of Lord Mahavira, the last of the 24 *Thirthankaras*. The concept and teachings of Mahavira are very relevant to the confused world of today. His work has been the greatest message that Indian civilisation could offer to the world, viz. *Ahimsa* or Non-Violence.

Buddhism has been the most important of all the philosophical ideas which have permeated the whole world and

civilisation as special gift from India. In fact, India had conquered more than half the world by the message of peace as enunciated and preached by the *Enlightened One*. Lord Buddha has been described truly as the LIGHT OF ASIA. There is not the slightest doubt that if our present civilisation cares to imbibe the message of Lord Buddha and practise even a fraction of that great message, there will be no danger of any armed conflict or war in future.

Islam is an important religion which is indeed a part and parcel of Indian civilisation and culture. Today, India is a country with the second largest Muslim population in the world. The rich contribution of Islam to the Indian cultural civilisation has been described in brief.

Facets of Sikhism as a modern religion has been dealt with in a minuscule form in a separate chapter. Similarly, Christianity, a very important religion of India is the third largest community which share a rich heritage that India is proud to have in the realm of spiritual achievement. Christianity has been spread and accepted in India in the first Century A.D. by one of the direct disciples of Lord Christ, the great Saint Thomas. He lived in India for more than 20 years and spread Christianity particularly in the South. His tomb in Mylapore, Madras, is a great pilgrimage centre to the Christians throughout the world. Christian worshippers from distant lands send their tributes to this holy place as a mark of respect and veneration to the holy Christ. The exploits and missionary activities of St. Francis Xavier are also dealt with in this short but crowded chapter. I visited both the holy tombs at Mylapore and Goa before completing this book.

The Parsis although they represent only a million of the population form an important part of Indian culture and civilisation. Zoroastorianism which has been preached and practised by that great prophet Zarathushtra in the Arab world is now concentrated only in India and more than 90 per cent of Zoroastrians are settled in India mainly in Bombay. They still proudly claim to have belonged to the Aryan tribes. The Zoroastrians obviously form a very important part of the Indian civilisation and culture. Some of them hold key

positions in Indian industry and literature and cultural life of the country's mainstream.

There are three other chapters which, in a nutshell convey the eternal message of Indian culture, viz. peace. There lies the secret of Indian culture and also its great immortality as attested and exemplified in the exciting accounts given by famous and renowned foreign travellers.

I am grateful to Shri Braham Vira Gupta, Managing Director, Metropolitan and Shri Vivek Gupta, Joint Managing Director of Metropolitan who invited me to write this book at a short notice. I am specially grateful to the authors and writers from whom I derived the confidence and main ideas-known and unknown. Here I must record my deep appreciation of the services rendered by my Private Secretary, Kumari Kavita, who inspite of her heavy assignments in the office helped me in finalising the manuscripts giving her no leisure or respite. I shall be glad and would feel my efforts fruitful if the book helps my readers to know more about the cultural heritage of India.

The last but one chapter is a subject matter which can be treated as a thesis of the book that is i.e. the Contribution of Indian Culture to World Peace. Important aspects like music, painting, architecture, could be added usefully to this book if there is favourable response from the readers.

I should record my debt of gratitude to the Librarian of Central Secretariat Kumari Manjari Bose and her colleagues Smt. Ila Dasgupta and Shri Santosh Rattan who readily and ungrudgingly helped me in constantly supplying me with the right books at the right time.

I am most grateful to Shri S. J. Balasubramaniam who took the trouble of going through the entire manuscript and enriched it by his studied comments.

Finally, words fail to record my deep and respectful gratitude to Hon'ble Shri Vasant Sathe who has been extremely kind enough to have written the Foreword to this Book. It has not only lent colour and substance to the chapters but certainly gave added prestige to the publication. Every time

I broach him with an outline of a new book, the Hon'ble Minister invariably comes out with a fresh topic which would help integration of the nation. In his wisdom he suggested this very subject when I presented him with a copy of my previous book on Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

The author accords hearty grateful thanks to the dynamic Managing Director, Sh. Braham Vira Gupta, who himself painstakingly prepared a very useful index to the entire book. He did it for the deep affection he so kindly has been showering on the author.

Finally I dedicate the book to Smt. Kamla Gupta wife of Sh. Braham Vira Gupta whom I had the rare opportunity to look to as my real sister for the last forty two years. Even two hours before she peacefully left this world so suddenly, she eagerly made queries about the book. It is not known to many that Kamlaji was a Hindi and Sanskrit scholar. Her contribution in building up the institution (METROPOLITAN) cannot be expressed in words. She constantly guided her husband and son in every way. May her soul rest in peace.

Rakhi Purnima

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Cultural Heritage of India

The cultural heritage of India is deeply suffused with spirituality. Spirituality is something inseparable from an Indian mind. In short it is the eternal soul of India. To quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan,

“Spiritual life is the true genius of India. Those who make the greatest appeal to the Indian mind are not the military conquerors, not the rich merchants or the great diplomats, but the holy sages, the *rishis* who embody spirituality at its finest and purest. India's pride is that almost in every generation and in every part of the country, from the time of her recorded history, she has produced these holy men who embody for her all that the country holds most dear and sacred. Though they generally remain away from the mainstream of life, kings and commoners pay reverent homage to them and take their advice in the problems of their personal lives as well as in public affairs. By their lives they teach us that pride and power, wealth and glory are nothing in comparison with the power of spirits. It is those who scorn their own lives, that raise life above our scorn.”

*India is perhaps the only country in the world where one would find at least a dozen well placed personalities leaving the royal robes and devoting their whole lives in search of Truth. Lord Buddha, Lord Mahavira, both hailing from royal families, are better known throughout the world but equally important are many other royal characters who left their royal palaces in search of Truth. Yamunacharya is one such great name. He was a ruler for 26 long years. He got the kingdom by winning a scholarly debate on Indian philosophy at the age of ten. He was the spiritual guru of the great Saint Ramanujacharya. Similarly Vartrihari, another great ruler left his kingdom in search of Truth and finally composed *Vairagya Satakam*, an authentic version on renunciation. India is the only country in the world where an emperor left everything wordly and devoted the whole life in the spread of the message of Peace of Mahamati Buddha throughout the world and left a permanent imprint in the annals of civilization. That Emperor Asoka did only after winning a war which left a deep imprint in his mind of the worthlessness of materialistic and huge bloodshed and catastrophe. Indian culture won almost half the world through the spread of Buddhism by this great ruler. Renunciation is the keynote to Indian cultural heritage. India's is the most ancient civilisation. It has kept its cultural heritage in tact. Great civilisations of Egypt, Babylon, Rome, Greece which one day sat at the pinnacle of glory are today heard no more. The main reason why Indian civilisation and culture is lively and uninterrupted is her acceptance of the best from all other contemporary streams. As Swami Vivekananda clearly explained to the delegates of the Parliament of Religion at Chicago in 1893, India stands for "assimilation and not dissension." That is the true spirit of Indian culture. In the words of Poet Tagore, assimilation of so many world cultures have contributed their might in a brilliant synthesis of the cream of highest world thoughts :*

"Come, O Aryan and Non-Aryan,
Hindu and Muslim,
Come, O English and you Christian,
Come, O Brahmin

Purify your mind and clasp the hands of all ;
Come, O downtrodden
And let vanish all burdens of your humiliation.
Tarry not, but come you all
To anoint the Mother on the shore of Bharat
Where men of all races have come together."

(*Gitanjali*)

A very important factor responsible for this living characteristic of the ancient cultural heritage is the enlightened knowledge revealed by the spiritual pathfinders from time to time. They never offered 'bookish' knowledge. Only after long spiritual experiments and experiences would these Godmen come to the doorsteps of the common men to tell them what real light meant. They were from different religions, castes and creed. They were from different regions of this ethnically vast country. But when they came with their realised Truth, the thirsty millions from all quarters received them with open arms. They totally forgot the details of difference. The Indian masses are equally well suited to these experiments with Truth.

Strangely enough, there is no major religious faith of the world that is not followed and practised in India. India by and large has Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and Jews. There are many rare opportunities of inter-exchange of religious experiments by the spiritual pathfinders. When the whole of Europe was witnessing religious persecution, India was experimenting one of the best spiritual perceptions in the *Bhakti Movement*. That was in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

In the development and sprouting of Indian culture, all the religions have played their due role perceptibly. Each one is Indian *in toto*. It has the charm of a majestic huge family with identification and full honour for each. The main reason of popularity of this transcendental super eminent mainstream of Indian heritage is the all-embracing aspect. Right from the days of the five thousand year old message of *Rig Veda*, Indian sages and seers have been assigning the highest respect

for human dignity. Man is the hero. Even in the epic of *Mahabharata* the sage ecstatically announces "Man is the greatest Truth. There is nothing higher than Man"

In a *Rig Vedic* Hymn we hear the voice of the Sage calling the ordinary man to join the choir. The *Rig Veda* says.

"Common be your prayers

Common be your end.

Common be your deliberation.

Common be your desires.

United be your hearts ;

United be your intentions.

Perfect be the union among you.

(Translation of a *Rig Vedic* Hymn)

THE MESSAGE OF VEDANTA

In an analytical study, the eminent scholar Swami Yatiswaranada of Ramakrishna Mission, Wiesbaden, Germany, gives a reason for the universality of the Indian culture. It is mainly because of the *Vedantic* approach to life. The Swami says,

"The *Vedanta*—which may be taken as the final word of Hindu spiritual culture—looks upon all religious systems as different approaches to the one Truth, the ever-pure, infinite, all-pervading Being who manifests Himself in and through man and nature, and yet remains transcendental without exhausting Himself in His manifestations and expressions.

It recognizes all prophets and divine personalities as different embodiments of the same Principle that stands at the back of them all and inspires them all. It believes in the potential divinity of all souls ; and encourages them to follow their own paths according to their spiritual capacity and tendencies. It asks the followers of all religions and philosophical systems to preserve their distinctive features and to assimilate the truths of others as much of others as much as possible. The true *Vedanta* attempts to combine religion and

philosophy, faith and reason, intensity and extensity of outlook and vision. It holds strict ethical discipline, scrupulous performance of duty and earnest spiritual culture to be the means to the realization of God—the Divine Principle in whom we live, move and have our being.”

It was left to two great monks of India specially to preach to the whole world the lofty thoughts of *Vedanta* and enrich once more its already rich treasure. They were Bhagawan Shakaracharya and Swami Vivekananda who reinvigorated the ideas of *Vedanta* throughout the world. The appearance of these two stalwarts in the realm of spirituality form an important epoch not only in the cultural history of India but of world civilization. We shall discuss, briefly about both.

GREAT MINDS IN SEARCH OF INDIA'S SOUL

When India was keenly searching her own separate philosophical and cultural identity, a galaxy of great minds came on their own to discover the foundations of India's cultural heritage. It was indeed a great coincidence or an event predestined that India was to rediscover her own soul :

The Aryan, the Non-Aryan, the Dravidian.
The Huns, the Pathans and the Moghuls.
They all have merged here into one body.
Today the West has opened its doors,
And from thence come gifts.
Giving and taking,
All will be welcome on the shores of Bharat,
Where men of all races have come together.

(Tagore : *Bharat Tirtha*)

Great many western minds devoted their lives to the exploration of Truth as depicted in the Indian holy scriptures. They wanted to rediscover the soul of India. In their great search for Truth they have done a great service to popularise the secrets of the ancient sages of India which is perhaps till today richest in the world.

There is a host of orientalists and foreign travellers who have recorded their views and appreciation of Indian way of living. Who will not feel proud of Indian culture when one reads Sister Nivedita's *Web in Indian Life*? Sister Nivedita accepted Indian culture as her own.

Among the learned philosopher scholars, the first name that comes to any Indian's mind would be that of Frederic Max Muller, the great German Scholar who devoted his whole life to the study of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

His six volumes on the *Rig Veda* and the masterly interpretations of the *Upanishads* have made him a dear friend of India for eternity, a country he loved from the bottom of his heart. He loved Indian cultural heritage so greatly that he expressed to his intimate friends his sincere desire to be born in India in his rebirth.

In Paris, Eugene Burnouf, an eminent Sanskrit scholar had already undertaken the task of uncovering the Truth inherent in the *Vedas*. In fact it was in 1845 that Max Muller heard this eminent Indologist in Paris unfolding in a popular lecture the secrets of the *Vedas*. This, as is recorded in the biography of Max Muller, "opened an entirely new world to his mind."

Max Muller set about collecting material for editing the *Rig Veda*. He had a great urge which made him almost mad to avail the material on *Rig Veda*. He first went to London in 1846. He found it a suitable spot to settle down to carry out his research. He made England his home. Very luckily he made English the medium of his scholarly work. He married an English lady Georgina who too helped him constantly in his literary research works. She also published posthumously Life and Letters of Max Muller. When this learned scholar passed away, Lokamanya Bala Gangadhar Tilak who, besides being a great national leader had keen eagerness to explore the inner secret of *Gita* and the *Vedas* (he wrote books on both the subjects) had expressed on October 28, 1900, "In him India has lost the warmest friend, the wisest lover and the most enthusiastic admirer whose place, alas ! will be filled we know not when."

Strangely enough Max Muller never visited India ! He had many Indian friends. He has recorded his appreciation of many contemporary Indian scholars and philosophers. This is recorded in his famous book *Auld Lang Syne—My Indian Friends*. He was convinced that India possessed an unlimited power to regenerate and was able to take up the challenge of the present without breaking the continuity with her rich past."

Max Muller was foremost among the Western followers of the *Vedanta*. He was himself a great exponent of *Vedantism*. In the words of Swami Vivekananda "Max Muller is a *Vedantist* of *Vedantists*. He has indeed caught the real soul of the melody of the *Vedanta*."

It is obvious from all records how the teachings of the *Vedanta* exercised a lasting and ever increasing influence on Max Muller's mind. A year before his death, he described the *Vedanta* philosophy a system in which human speculation seemed to have reached its acme. He acknowledged his indebtedness to *Vedanta* and agreed with Schopenhauer, who said : "In the whole world there is no study, except that of the original (*Upanishads*), so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishads*. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death."

In his Essay on *My Indian Correspondents* Max Muller wrote, "India has as much to teach us as Greece and Rome, nay I should say, more."

Max Muller wrote, "as classical scholars yearn to see Rome or Athens, I yearned to see Benares and to bathe in the sacred waters of the Ganges !"

Max Muller considered Raja Rammohan Roy as a great leader of the whole of social reforms. "Rammohan Roy, to my mind a truly great man, a man who did a truly great work, and whose name, if it is right to prophecy, will be remembered for ever, with some of his fellow labourers and followers as one of the great benefactors of mankind."

In a famous speech at the Cambridge University, Max Muller observed, "If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth,

power and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human minds has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India.”

Max Muller noted the differences too between—the Indian and Western ways of thinking. “In one respect the Indians differ from us very characteristically. They give very free expression to their sentiments, whether of love or admiration, and even when they have to express their disapproval they do it in the gentlest and least offensive words.”

(Max Muller : *Essay on My Indian Correspondents*)

In the same book, in the same vein, Max Muller further wrote, “The people of India are still a deep secret to us and if I have succeeded in withdrawing the curtain from only a small portion of their inmost thoughts and feelings, here and there, I have helped to change mere curiosity about them into warm human sympathy with them.”

No single learned scholar ever expressed his deep reverence for an alien and at that time a dependent country and so far away, than Max Muller did for India. Free India must give him proper recognition in a befitting manner. In his lecture on *Human Interest of Sanskrit Literature*, Max Muller noted, “We have before us a stream of literary four hundred. With the exception of China there is nothing like this in the whole world. It is difficult to give an idea of the enormous extent and variety of that literature. This is more, I believe, than the whole classical literature of Greece and Italy put together.”

Any student of India's cultural heritage must make a special note of it particularly because it is from a world authority who knew the background of cultural heritage and their ancient literature. He was, and perhaps would continue to be the most learned among the well informed scholars.

To one single individual goes the credit of putting India's culture and philosophy in the world map, strongly and most emphatically and, above all spontaneously on his own. It will not be wrong perhaps to observe, he knew the secret of Indian culture, even more than the most knowledgeable Indian. Max Muller will be a name in Indian History of culture and philosophy written in letters of gold as long as this great nation stand at par with any ancient civilisation of the world.

Appreciation of Indian culture had henceforth attracted a large number of western scholars and philosophers who took up the work on their own. They might have been equally eager to know the Secret of Indian Soul. But none would match Max Muller. He was a giant among great minds. Max Muller wrote, "Much of the excellence of the ancient Sanskrit Philosophers is due to their having been undisturbed by the thought of there being a public to please or critics to appease. They thought of nothing but the work they had determined to do ; their one aim was to make it as perfect as it could be made. Need we wonder then that their work was done as well as it could be done, and that it has lasted for thousands of years."

(Max Muller : *Three Lectures on Vedanta Philosophy* pp. 39-40)

In his masterly *Philosophy of the Upanishads* Deussen explaining the state of mind reaching the *Brahman* and the *Atman* appreciates the teachings of the *Upanishads*. The identity between the subject and the object was realised in India, maintains Deussen, before Plato was born. He wrote, "If we strip this thought of the various forms, figurative to the highest degree and not seldom extravagant, under which it appears in the *Vedanta* texts, and philosophical simplicity as the identity of God and the soul, the *Brahman* and the *Atman*, it will be found to possess a significance reaching far beyond the *Upanishads*, their time and country; may, we claim for it an inestimable value for the whole race of mankind."

Deussen clarified further, "We are unable to look into the future, we do not know what revelations and discoveries

are in store for the restlessly inquiring human spirit; but one thing we may assert with confidence—whatever new and unwanted paths the philosophy of future may strike out, this principle will remain permanently unshaken, and from it no deviation can possibly take place. If ever a general solution is reached of the great riddle, which presents itself to the philosopher in the nature of things, all the more clearly the future our knowledge extends, the key can only be found where alone the secret of nature lies open to us from within, that is to say, in our inner most self. It was here that for the first time the original thinkers of the Upanishads, to their immortal honour found it when they recognised our *Atman*, our inmost individual being, as the *Brahman*, the inmost being of Universal nature and of all her phenomena.”

(Deussen : *Philosophy of Upanishads*, pp. 39-40)

Horace Hayman Wilson (1786-1860) was a great Indologist. As an orientalist he tops as a scholar, a linguist, historian and a good musician. He translated the *Rig Veda* and also an edition of the *Vishnu Purana*.

Wilson wrote, “When the texts of *Rig Veda* and *Yajur Veda* are completed, we shall be in the possession of materials sufficient for the safe appreciation of the results to be derived from them, and of the actual condition of the Hindus, both political and religious, at a date coeval with that of the yet earliest known records of social organisation—long anterior to the dawn of Grecian civilisation—prior to the oldest vestiges of the Assyrian Empire yet discovered—contemporary probably with the oldest Hebrew writings, and posterior only to the Egyptian dynasties, of which, however we yet know little except barren names. The *Vedas* give us abundant information/ respecting all that is most interesting in the contemplation of antiquity.” This was written in the *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* in 1852.

Eugene Burnouf (1801-1852) was the founder of the *Societe Asiatique* in Paris. He was one of the pioneers among them who translated the *Bhagavad Gita*. He also translated the *Saddharma*, *Pundarika*, the *Lotus of the Good Law*, a Buddhist

classic. His most important gift, specially to the cause of world wide spreading of the essence of Indian culture was however to inspire his most illustrious pupil Max Muller who was attracted to the study of the *Vedas* and finally devoted his whole life to the cause of study in depth in 51 volumes of the ancient scripture only after hearing a series of talks by Burnouf in Paris.

There were many great minds like those of Monier Wilson, Keith, Winternitz, who devoted a major portion of their life's works in search of eternal soul of India.

A large number of friends of India's culture and rich heritage had been so much attracted to India's philosophy that they on their own had undertaken many solid projects on rediscovering the secret of India's heart. Emerson, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Yeats, Fredrick Manchester, Juan Mascaro, Romain Rolland, Prof. A.L. Basham are only a few to mention. All these research and revival of her culture indeed point to a heritage a systematic discipline.

ROLE OF BHAGAWAN SHANKARACHARYA IN CHANGING FACE OF INDIAN CULTURE

The greatest contribution of Bhagawan Shankara has been the organising of all the religious sects under *Dasnami sampradaya*. He harmonised all the philosophical systems. He is *Jagat Guru*, because the entire monks of *Sanatana Dharma* were organised under *Dasanamis*. They are *Asrama*, *Vana*, *Aranya*, *Giri*, *Paryata*, *Sagara*, *Saraswati*, *Bharati*, *Puri* and *Tirtha*. All the monks of India must belong to one of them.

No story of Indian culture can ever be perfect or complete without a respectful reference to Bhagawan Shankaracharya. It was left to this most dynamic and brilliant saint to revive *Sanatan Dharma* and popularise the lofty ideas of the *Vedanta*. The saint had realised the perceptions of all existing scriptures. He could even in his vision see events to come and prepared the whole country for receiving all lofty ideas. Shankara could visualise that the greatest responsibility in this task of communicating the real message of religion lay with the Saints.

Bhagawan Shankara's main task was to culture the minds to create an atmosphere of integration which meant a "combination of diverse elements of perception" leading to a happy synthesis of culture. This perception proved the most important factor in communal harmony in a multi religious nation like India because in this tilt the whole interpretation and acceptance of the divine messages. Perception here mean "intuitive recognition of truth" on asethetic quality. It is the most sensitive element because this perception signified "action by which the mind refers its sensations to external object as cause." It is the root cause of all thoughts. It generates all ideas. This is applicable to all thoughts—high, noble and sublime. Adi Shankaracharya, till today is the most respected Godman who appeared on the Indian cultural scene at a time when it was almost on a point of getting extinct.

Shankaracharya felt that in the great task of moulding the minds properly the Saints have a unique role to play because they understand the minds of the masses of people better than even the rulers. That is mainly because of their direct contact with them. These saints make a regular drill of pilgrimage. Through these pilgrimage they travel long distances and come in touch with varied people - rich and poor, educated and the illiterate. This forge naturally a direct connection with the masses. These Savants meet their disciples and devotees directly and transmit the message of universal brotherhood of man. Even today, the only solution of bringing communal harmony lies more on such saintly people than the politicians. That is exactly why the great saint took the first step to organise all the Saints in a disciplined manner.

Indiraji once said most aptly, "India is a secular democracy where people of all religious and cultures have been living in harmony and with dignity. This harmony and co-existence has been fostered through centuries by innumerable saints and savants—the Godmen who through their self-realised enlightenment have been preaching the message of universal brotherhood of man. These pathfinders belong to many faiths and hail from different regions of the land."

Bhagawan Shankaracharya was undisputedly the greatest among such pathfinders whose mass contact created better understanding among people—rich and poor, educated and uneducated. Adi Shankara (781 AD—820 AD) appeared on the scene at a time when religious preachers misinterpreted the messages and made a mess of everything. The whole religious life of the people was in a chaotic condition. Shankara himself had described this miserable plight of religion in his famous *Brahmasutra*.

It was not an easy task for a young lad—Shankara embraced monkhood at the tender age of eight, by sixteen he was the undisputed greatest among the contemporary saints of whole of India – to reform the religious outlook of millions of his countrymen. Shankara wrote in his *Brahmasutra*, “He who upholds that the people of old were no more capable of conversing with the gods than people are at present (i.e. eighth century AD) might as well hold that because there is at present no ruler paramount (*Sarvabhou*), there were no such sovereign rulers even in former times ; or he might argue that in former times the vocations and duties pertaining to the different classes and stations in life were as generally unsettled as they are now.”

Shankara realised that unless some immediate reforms were not taken up to save his millions of countrymen scattered all over a vast land, geographically and administratively divided, politically different from part to part and emotionally living in disharmony and dissension there was no way for the country to make any progress. He wanted immediately to take up the challenge on his own shoulders.

Shankara did it. He covered the country—from Kashmir to Kanya Kumari and from Dwaraka to Puri. After thoroughly convincing the people from these localities about the universality of brotherhood of humankind as preached in the *Vedas* could get satisfaction. God alone, the Supreme *Advaita*. So it is futile to fight with minor narrow views.

Shankara left a permanent imprint in the world civilisation specially in the realm of spirituality by transmitting this great

message. To give it a permanent shape he erected four monasteries. He himself hailed from the holy land of Kaladi in Kerala. But while erecting these monasteries or *Maths* he made it a point to do so in four corners of India. In his wider vision of integrating the country and uniting it emotionally he deliberately did so. These are four great centres of spiritual enlightenment even today. In the North, *Joshimath* or *Jyotirmath* stands near Badarikashram. In the South, *Shringerimath* is situated at Rameswar Kshetra. In the East at Purushattama Kshetra at Puri, the *Gobardhana Math* and at the West, at Dwarka Kshetra the *Sharada Math*.

GREATEST CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN CULTURE

Shankara's greatest contribution to Indian culture was, as already observed, he organised the entire realm of monks spread throughout the land. He divided them in ten teams. So they are known as *Dasanamis*. They are *Asrama*, *Vana*, *Aranya*, *Giri*, *Parvata*, *Sagara*, *Saraswati*, *Bharati*, *Puri* and *Tirtha*. All the monks of India, till today must belong to one of these ten orders. That is why Bhagawan Shankara is worshipped and described as *Jagat Guru*. The disappearance of Shankara is still a mystery like that of Mahaprabhu Chaitanya.

Summing up the great works of the greatest Saint of India Sister Nivedita wrote, "In the course of a few years, to have nominated the founders of no less than ten great religious orders of which four fully retain their prestige to the present day, to have acquainted to create a distinct philosophy and impress himself on the scholarly imagination of India which is a pre-eminence that 1200 years have not sufficed to shake ; to have written poems whose grandeur makes his unmistakable even to foreign and unlearned ears and at the same time to have lived with his disciples, in all the radiant love and simple pathos of the Saints—this is the greatest that we must appreciate but cannot understand."

The whole world is today running amuck after material wealth. That greed and lust for illusory richness—like the golden deer after which even a great incarnation like Rama ran

— must be replaced by a spirit of renunciation and complete devotion to the universal Father.

“O fool abandon the desire for amassing wealth, cultivate good thoughts in your mind. Devote your mind to righteousness and let dispassion be your law. Content your mind with what you earn through the deeds performed by your previous *Karma*,” says Shankara. He reminds, “Ever remember that riches bring grief ; indeed no joy abides in them. A rich man even fears his own son, this happens everywhere.” The illusion of the world is due solely to an illusory notice and is not an absolute reality.” That is the greatest Truth. We are fighting each other because of lack of understanding of this great Truth.

In his immortal *Dakshinamurti Stotram*, popularly known as *Eusa Sloki* which is indeed the epitome of the greatest Saint of India’s message, Shankara clearly says, “Various are the understanding and arguments of people in regard to Truth. The body, senses, life forces the awareness of changes, the void, woman, infant, the blind and inert—all these States and qualities are superimposed on the *Atman* due to the power of its *maya*. He who destroys the *maya* responsible for this misconception of the *Atman*—to that *Dakshinamurti*, the Supreme Being, embodied in the auspicious and benign Guru, I offer my profound salutation.”

There is only One that exists ; learned men speak of it in several ways. God here is common to all of us. In his *Bhujagovindam*—a portraiture of the sorrows of life with a clarion call to meditate on the Lord Govinda—Shankara exhorts men not to be intolerant of one another, particularly if one aspires to that faculty which is characteristic of God, one should learn to maintain a balanced mind with respect to all earthly things and men.

There is nothing separately as religion. Except the Universal *Brahman* everything is illusion. How do you find that Universal *Brahman* ? Shankara gives a lucid explanation of the most difficult question of exploring Truth. The great Saint said, “The moving and the non-moving universe is but the manifestation of His subtle and unmanifest eightfold form, viz.

earth, water, fire, air sky, sun, moon and *Jivatman*. He by whose grace all these manifestations disappear with the realization nothing exists except the supreme *Brahman*,—to that *Dakshinamurti*, the Supreme Being, embodied in the auspicious and benign Guru, I offer my profound salutation.”

So the *Atman* is all pervasive. When one attains to that all pervasive nature and realizes oneness with it and reaches the plenitude of realization and spiritual joy where is the question of the narrow dogma or barrier of limited or restricted field of religious rituals or divisive tendencies ?

According to Shankaracharya the main source of knowledge of the *Brahman* is the teaching of the *Vedanta*. In his famous *Brahma Sutra bhasya*, Shankaracharya noted, “*Brahman*, which is omniscient, omnipotent, and the cause of the origination, sustenance, and resolution of the world, is known only from the *Vedantic* teaching.” Only this teaching, leads to harmony and better understanding. Noted Shankara, “Indeed in all the *Vedantic* texts, it is this meaning that is expounded as the purport ; and it is thus that the texts acquire harmony.” The teachings of *Vedanta* removes all differences. One must be strong. One must be knowledgeable. “The Self is the knowledge.”

The highest teaching of Shankara was to look to every creature as manifestation of God. In his *Brahma Sutra bhasya*, Shankara said, “Indeed, what is called *Jiva* is not absolutely different from *Brahman*. The *Jiva*, while being *Brahman*, comes to be called ‘agent’ and ‘enjoyer’ as conditioned adjuncts such as the intellect.”

In modern times Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa gave the same message to his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda and directed him to serve Man as God—*Jiva is Shiva*. Swami Vivekananda, who can be rightly described, as a modern Shankaracharya translated the Master’s message into practice. Swamiji also echoed the voice of Shankara when he called the youth of the country to give up differences and become strong and inculcate self confidence. Shankara said, in his masterly *Kena Upanishad Vakya Bhasya*, “The strength that is born of

nescience is perishable, for nescience gets sublated by knowledge. But there is nothing that can sublimate knowledge. Hence, the strength born of knowledge is immortal. Thus, knowledge becomes the sole instrument of immortality. There is the *Atharvuna sruti (Mundaka)* text, "This Self is not gained by one who lacks strength."

THREAD OF CONTINUITY IN INDIAN CULTURE

When all the ancient civilisations have gone into oblivion the Indian culture, rich in its heritage, persists. What are the reasons ? All great ancient cultures of the world—Greek, Roman, Egyptian have gone into oblivion. Only the Indian civilisation is going as strong as ever. Why? How?

In ancient India we had only one religion—the culture standing on the *Vedic* philosophy. Even today after five thousand years they stand as the main guiding principles of daily life. The perception of those who formed or introduced or brought newer or fresher philosophies of life were never outright rejected. Every fresh faith was most welcome. Because the basic philosophy of an ordinary Indian is derived from enlightened knowledge that is universal. That universality of outlook and wider vision of life is the basic foundation of Indian culture.

For instance when somebody says that the motto of the nation *Satyam eva jayate na nritam* : Truth alone triumphs, not untruth, nobody will protest that they cannot accept it because it is from the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Nobody would hesitate to accept it. The principle is universal. It is common to all existing religions of the world. Who can challenge it ?

Or when some scholar says that the foundation of Indian culture rests on the first brick of the *Rig Veda* which says *Ekam sad vipra bahuda badanti*, God is one and the same. He is described in many ways who will question it ? Which religion does not believe in this universal Truth. God is supreme. Knowledge is power. Right behaviour only leads to peace and not wrong. Anger erodes the mind. Mind is the spur of all actions. So one must culture mind to adjust to any situation. Suffering in life is sure to be faced bravely by one's strength

of mind. Who will question it? Every body has to face realities of life. In a multi-religious and multi lingual society the first lesson that any individual must learn is to adjust oneself, to settle oneself, to regulate oneself to the social set up. That is the only way to live in peace. Indian philosophy and culture is based on value judgment that is eternal, ceaseless, unchangeable. These values have been culled from all religious faiths and systems of thoughts. In this unique picking and choosing nobody ever suffered from any feeling that one faith was fresh or restricted to a few or that it came from outside. India believes firmly in the motto *Vasudhoivo Kutumbakam*, the whole *Vasudha* (world) is her *Kutumbaka* (her relation).

The main reason for India's longest cultural survival with growth, in fact it has sprouted out the most, is its break in monotony and stagnation. The Indian culture is just like a flowing river without any stagnation. It has been further enriched by all those also who came to conquer her. She has succeeded to conquer the conqueror with all attributes, culture and tradition. The adventurers were overwhelmed by love and affection, hospitality and natural wealth of plenty. This addition had definitely infused new vigour in her cultural life.

The main reason of continuity in Indian Cultural tradition and ever growing lofty philosophy is that it never had any idea of spreading her authority over anybody or any country. It had never adopted any expansionist policy. It has allowed all religions to grow independently. By and large, India is a peace loving country and she firmly believes in co-existence and not expansion. She never took any aggressive move. An ordinary Indian too, is at heart, peace loving and will not take to any aggressive posture unless provoked. Even after a victory in Indo-Pak war, for instance, India returned not only the 93,000 prisoners of war, she returned also the areas conquered by her army. This absence of greed, and desire to become rich or affluent over night is the root cause of the lasting cultural heritage. An Indian, by nature, shuns violence. The Indian prince who left the royal palace in search of

Truth underwent the toughest penance. Bhagawan Mahavira gave the whole world the immortal message of *Ahimsa*—Non violence. That was more than two thousand six hundred years ago. The whole world knows how this immortal message of the Saint served as the strongest weapon for freedom fighters in India against the mighty alien rulers who refused to leave a life of luxury and enjoyment in India.

Bhagwan Mahavira's message of *Ahimsa* is being experimented in many countries in the Third World who are fighting against casteism and racial segregation. One of the most significant messages to the world by Indian culture is that of Peace—Non violence. Mahatma Gandhi was not a Jaina and yet he was the biggest among the Jainas. He put this theory into active practice and wrought a miracle by making it the principal weapon in his toughest and longest fight for freedom for his country. He first experimented it in South Africa where the struggle is still going on. Mahavira's message of Non-violence is not restricted only to his followers. Today it is a part of Indian culture and tradition.

According to Mahavira, "The main sign of *Dharma* is Non-Violence. The next significance is stoicism. One who loses his grip on stoicism under stress cannot practise non-violence. A truly non-violent being would confer love on his enemies like his friends. He can put up with insults with fortitude. The one capable of being indifferent to happy situation and the unhappy one, dispassionately, is stoic and non-violent."

Here Bhagawan Mahavira did not speak as the head of a religious sect in Indian—Jainism. He mirrored the soul of India through his immortal utterances.

Selfless service and renunciation are the main aspects that have been asked by the ancient sages and seers to be taken care of. "Practise *Dharma* not for prosperity and comforts nor for religious credits but for the purgation of your own self."

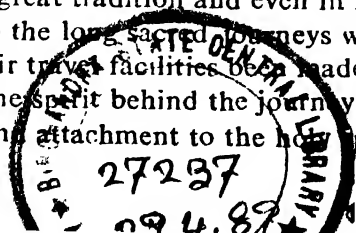
We in modern world are mere fools who run after name, fame and affluence. That does not give any peace of mind.

We are leaving out cream and running after water. There is nothing as powerful as knowledge. There is no knowledge without the exploration of Truth. We, in modern era, are not interested in the real search of peace. On the contrary we are endangering peace by each country being over ambitious. As a result, we are missing the real joys of life.

Says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, "This earth is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this earth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. *Brahman* is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all." This is the universality of Indian culture that has made it eternal and immortal.

This is the concept of living in India. This is the idea of representative Indian culture which does not speak out for the sake of speaking and getting its voice raised in the world. This is the voice of India's soul. This is the secret key to the Lord, the universal Father. How does the question of a fight can ever arise if you practise even a fraction of this Truth? Only thing is our darkest ignorance about ourselves. We do not know ourselves. This is why repeatedly the *Upanishad* says *Atmanang' biddhi*—"Know thyself."

A thread that binds the whole country together emotionally is the common *mantras* in the holy scriptures and places of pilgrimages with a deep touch of pride for the ancient tradition and culture. The great shrines of *Sufi* Saints, the art and architectural grandeur of the different parts of the country are visited—and what is more important they are appreciated by the common man with great pride with a sense of possession. People from different parts of the country visit them regularly in an unending stream. The pilgrim in the past did not hesitate even to risk a hazardous journey from a village in Bengal to Rameshwaram or from Madurai to Puri on foot. This has become a great tradition and even in modern days, individuals do take up the long sacred journeys which have, due to transport and air travel facilities been made easier. What is noticeable is the spirit behind the journey. That spirit of reverence, humility and attachment to the holy spot that has contributed



greatly in the continuity of the tradition which has a glorious past history for five thousand years. This is not only emotional integration and unity of the vast country. This brings the whole nation closer. This is a unique feature followed by people of all religious faiths.

If only one comes to the holy Temple of *Vishwanath* at Varanasi or *Vaidyanath Dham* at Deoghar or *Puskar Tirtha* at Ajmer, one will be simply struck with the touch of great sentiments of the *yatis*. People will not hesitate to spend years' saving to have a *Darshan* of *Balaji* at Tirupati. People take even today a journey from *Khir Bhavani* Temple at Srinagar to Kanyakumari to see the same Goddess. Similarly, a pilgrim will like to see the Shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti at Ajmer from Delhi or Nizamuddin Aulia at Delhi from Hyderabad or *Hazaratbal* at Srinagar from Lucknow. Pilgrims flock, round the year, to pay their homage to the tomb of the great St. Thomas at Mylapore, Madras or to the Church dedicated to St. Xavier in Goa. They rush to the *Golden Temple* at Amritsar from Assam to pay homage to the Sikh Gurus and touch the water, which is described as *Amrita*, i.e. nectar. What is more important and equally deeply significant is the fact that these travels are not restricted to people associated with their respective faiths. Any visitor to Srinagar will very much cherish the idea of touching the Holy Spot where the sacred Hair of the Prophet is kept at Hazrat Bal. Any traveller in Calcutta will like to visit the famous Jain Temple—Parasnath Temple irrespective of his being a Hindu, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist or Jain. That has been and is the spirit of Indian culture.

There is a reason for this great yearning for touching the holy spots. In India knowledge had to be imparted only through enlightened preceptors. Mere bookish knowledge never attracted an Indian till before the advent of the British rule. There is the greatest respect for knowledge even today. Chanakya or Kautilya, one of the most learned personalities ever born on earth—who can be compared only to Plato or Socrates—has clearly written that in India, the difference between a king and a learned man is very clearly defined.

Whereas the king is respected only in his own kingdom, the learned are respected throughout the world.

A learned man never runs after monetary gains. He is interested in generating learning among his disciples or students whom he treats more affectionately than his own sons. In return, he would expect nothing. His satisfaction would be that his own knowledge has been fully utilised. Buddha, the *Mahamati* described this spreading of knowledge as that of "light from lamp to lamp." In modern days, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan described this novel way of imparting real knowledge as *Prabachana* from mouth to mouth. *Vidyadān*, in India is a sacred action and one who does it is considered as a noble soul. Even today, India believes in simple living and high thinking. Can you think of a country where a street beggar is singing the immortal songs of Kabir, Meerabī, Surdas, Nanak or Ramprasad? He does not know whose song he is singing but his choked voice with emotion will bring tears even in your eyes. That is because of the great feeling with which he is attuned to the great Infinite. That is the thread he is carrying in Indian culture. To him getting a penny from you is only secondary. He knows he is earning something simultaneously which is of priceless value. That is his inner bliss. He is at the same time enkindling the lamp in your heart too. There is no parallel to this aspect of cultural heritage in any part of the world. Abhorrence for wealth and lust for money is very much in the blood of all Indians irrespective of his hailing from any region of India or any religion. He will prefer peace to wealth. And he knows money can get you many things but not everything. Even an ordinary Indian's quest for Truth and divine light has been the main secret of the long journey of cultural heritage. Charity is a common characteristic of Indian culture. People of all religious faith follow it.

One of the basic reasons of survival of the ancient Indian culture is the recognition and simultaneous acceptance of both the temporal and spiritual values of life. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "Spiritual and temporal have indeed to be perfectly harmonised, for the spirit works through mind and

body. But the purely intellectual or heavily material culture of the kind that Europe now favours bears in its heart the seed of death; for the living aim of culture is the realisation on earth of the kingdom of heaven. India, though its urge is towards the Eternal, since that is always the highest, the entirely real, still contains in her own culture and her own philosophy a supreme reconciliation of the eternal and the temporal and she need not seek it from outside."

(Sri Aurobindo : *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 81)

Indian culture does not reject anything foreign outright. Her tradition has been always to imbibe and assimilate. It has never been critical or aggressive to anything that came from outside. On the contrary India was perhaps the only country which, in course of time and space made the foreign element a part on her own quite voluntarily. That is basically the greatness and magnanimity of her culture. The outlook of an ordinary Indian is much wider than any of his western counterpart. The assimilation of the western practical approach with the deeply spiritual approach to life has made this culture definitely rich. But it must be strongly recorded that while doing so India never slightly deviated from her own cultural moorings. The basic values for the search of the Truth and exploring the *Infinite* and the great unknown still persists inspite of her familiarity with the modern scientific discoveries and inventions and innovations. To quote Sri Aurobindo, "Her surface mind rather than her deeper intelligence has been obliged to admit many western ideas—liberty, equality, democracy and others,—and to reconcile them with her *Vedantic* Truth; but she has not been altogether at ease with them in the western form and she seeks about already in her thought to give to them an Indian touch which cannot fail to be a spiritualised turn."

(*Ibid*, p. 14)

That is the special characteristic of the cultural heritage in India. That is, to be precise, is also the origin of her secret to be still so prominently progressing like a running rivulet which keeps on flowing. There was an onslaught on her cultural

mainstream specially during the nineteenth century when the westernisation of a section of middle class intelligentsia were ensnared by the dazzling materialistic and modernity of the West. Meanwhile English knowledge got spread. A new culture was growing up in Western world. The English knowing young men and women were confused. Because they also came in touch with the literature of their own land brought out by foreigners by this time.

Obviously there was a conflict of culture. There was rupture in the mind. Two major cultural ideas clashed. Their outlook were completely different. The basic difference between the two got enunciated by a great modern Saint who knew both quite well. Sri Aurobindo made it clear, "The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture, springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilisation. It is the turn which this aim imposes on all the rich and luxuriant variety of its forms and rhythms that gives to it its unique character. For even what it has in common with other cultures gets from that turn a stamp of striking originality and solitary greatness. A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life but it even tried as far as that could be done in the past conditions of human race, to turn the whole life towards spirituality.

(Sri Aurobindo : *The Foundations of Indian Culture*
pp. 137-38)

This was the main bone of contention for a major confrontation. Basically and fundamentally this deep spiritually drenched feeling was threatened to be wiped out by the new European cultural onslaught. Sri Aurobindo himself was brought up and trained entirely on the western model. Till his youth he was completely ignorant of Indian culture. When he became so well versed in Greek and Roman culture, he knew almost nothing about his country's rich cultural heritage. That was because his father became a victim of the new wave and kept all his three children away from India so that they did not 'waste' time in learning these backgrounds for which he thought there was no necessity. That by itself gave a glaring example how Indian culture almost fell a prey to the aggres-

sively modern European attack. But destiny only smiled. Sri Aurobindo, at the right time struck hard at the root. He followed the strong warning given by Swami Vivekananda who had already started the movement not only in India but abroad. In the assemblies collected in Europe and America, the intrepid monk of India, in his fiery speeches not only did not hesitate to attack them most blatantly for their lust for luxury, greed for wealth and affluence and negligence of spiritual life, he also strongly pleaded for acceptance of Indian values if they wanted the world free from clash of competition and desired real peace.

Sri Aurobindo noted, "The emphasis of the western mind is on life, the outer life above all, the things that are grasped, visible, tangible. The inner life is taken only as an intelligent reflection of the outer world with the reason for a firm putter of things into shape, an intelligent critic, builder, refiner of the external materials offered by Nature. The present use of living materials offered by Nature, the present use of living to be wholly in this life and for this life, is all the preoccupation of Europe. The present life of the individual and the continuous physical existence and developing mind and knowledge of humanity make up her one mind and knowledge of humanity, make up her one absorbing interest. Even from religion the West is apt to demand that it shall subordinate its aim or its effect to this utility of the immediate visible world. The Greek and the Roman looked on religious cult as a sanction for the life of the *polis* or a force for the just firmness and stability of the State." So it was, hundred per cent materialistic in outlook as distinct from the spirit of renunciation and divine bliss as advocated by the Indian spiritual approach where the struggle is to explore the Truth, the enlightened knowledge and experience divine bliss by knowledge of the *Brahman* which is Infinite and *Self*. As against the western target to succeed in material gain and prosperity India stands for "The *Dharma*, at once religious law of action and deepest law of our nature is, not as in the western idea, a creed, cult or ideal inspiring an ethical and social rule; it is the right law of functioning of our life in all its parts. The tendency of man to seek after a just

and perfect law of his living finds its truth and its justification in the *Dharma*. Everything indeed has its *Dharma*, its law of life imposed on it by its nature; but for man the *Dharma* is the conscious imposition of a rule of ideal living on all his members. *Dharma* is fixed in its essence but still it develops in our consciousness and evolves and has its steps; there are gradations of spiritual and ethical ascension in the search for the highest law of our nature."

This Truth was from the pen of a Saint in the making. It was from one's realised inner light. It was not from external bookish wordly experiments and experience because, soon after writing these lines, Sri Aurobindo himself left everything and spent the rest of his life as an ascetic in Pondicherry *Ashrama*.

So Aurobindo who was convinced, after his deep studies and yogic experiments about the real significance and depth of philosophy of Indian culture, clearly warned Indians against being lured by the western model of which his own father became a victim. "The modern European civilisation which has invaded Asia and which all violent attacks on Indian ideals, represent is the effective form of this—materialistic culture. India, true to her spiritual motive, has never shared in the physical attacks of Asia upon Europe, her method has always been an infiltration of the world with her ideas, such as we today see again in progress."

(*Ibid*, p. 6)

A very basic difference between the Indian and western experiments in philosophy and culture is that whereas the western one is dependent on research experiments, the Indian one is grown out of inner vision. Bookish knowledge is considered as *Avidya*. Knowledge on material gain is again considered as *Avidya*. Real knowledge is only through Self enlightenment. That must be concerning divine light. "Indian religion never considered intellectual or theological conceptions about Supreme Truth to be one thing of central importance. To pursue that Truth under whatever conception or whatever form, to attain to it by inner experience, to live in it in consciousness, held to be the sole thing needful."

It was not merely the sole thing. It was the soul of Indian philosophy and culture.

Right from the *Rig Veda*, all our philosophical treatises are revelations of inner light. The entire literature of the four *Vedas* were expressions of sages who got enlightened knowledge only after undergoing deep spiritual exercises. They never depended on mere books. The *Upanishads* were the outcome of deep spiritual realisations, also of the Saints of India who realised truth after years of deep meditation. And what were their teachings? Not any material gain. Far from it. It was on the contrary to shun this materialistic wealth and lust for life. They have been insisting on renunciation pleading for complete abhorrence of temporal values.

Next to the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, is the *Srimad Bhagavad-gita*. What is the theme of this holy scripture? It is, in one word, *renunciation*. The whole of *Gita* denotes the philosophy of life. It insists on mortality of life and immortality of Soul. The *Gita* exhorts a devotee to completely surrender himself to God—*Sri Krishna*. At the same time he says he is *bhakta parardhina*, a prisoner of a devotee. *Sri Krishna* observed in the *Gita*. "Once you surrender yourself to me, I take your complete charge." Many are the instances where royal personalities, like Yamunacharya left a rule of 26 years and took to monkhood (he became later the guru of Sri Ramanujacharya, one of the greatest members of the Trinity—Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva). It was after reading the *Srimad Bhagavadgita*! So, in this country the treatment of religion and philosophy, culture and tradition are just the reverse. Instead of one becoming prosperous and wealthy, your culture acquires a new aptitude and attitude of mind. That is *renunciation*.

Why only the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*? What about the two famous epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*? In the *Ramayana*, Ram was banished to forest for fourteen years just to honour the word of his royal father. The throne was offered to his step brother *Bharat*. He declined it. He begged Rama to return. But Rama was firm in honouring his father's promise. So he refused to

return. Where on earth one will ever witness such a scene where the throne has been set aside only to honour a father's promise? Compared to this there are instances in subsequent history, where brother killed brother to occupy the throne, where a son did not hesitate to kill the father to ascend the royal chair. And what did Bharat do? He gave a proxy to Rama's rule over Ayodhya as a regent after placing the wooden slippers of his eldest brother who was already declared the crown prince. There are no indications anywhere to guide you to acquire wealth and money.

What do we see in the other Epic the *Mahabharata*, a story of a fierce war, perhaps the longest and the fiercest fought in northern India involving all the principalities and states. The *Kurukshetra* was the scene of battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. It was over the lure of the throne no doubt. Duryodhana was a greedy dishonest prince who felt jealous of the popularity of the Pandavas. Even his royal father Dhritarashtra made Yudhishthira sit on the throne. He also crowned him duly. But Duryodhana did not accept this. He bided time to gain the throne and power by means fair or foul. He conspired many plots even to get them killed. Finally, taking full advantage of Yudhishthira's weakness for gambling in dice he worsted him in the stakes. The *Kurukshetra* war has been described in detail in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. Many world famous scholars consider it as the first systematic piece of history in the world. And what was the result? Obviously, in spite of their muscle strength—all the great generals like veteran Dronacharya, Karna, Duryodhana, Bhishma and others—the Pandavas with truth on their side finally won the battle. The *Mundaka Upanishad's* utterances that Truth alone triumphs and not a lie—*Satyameva Jayate na nritam* was practically put into practice. The *Pandavas* lost many of their near relations like Arjuna's son Abhimanyu and others but they did win the battle.

What did they do? They won the war. They fought for justice and justice prevailed. They were however, least interested in the throne. The Pandavas left the kingdom in the hands of a grandson Parikshita and left for the heavens.

None of the holy scriptures preached anywhere about being prosperous, materialistic and wealthy. On the contrary they prescribed austerity, penance, spirituality and search for inner light. The scriptures strongly recommended ways to give up desire, passion, lust for wealth as the best means of attaining peace and divine light. That has been the principal aim of Indian culture, as reflected in the scriptures of all religions. The message of renunciation is a continuous thread that runs through the Indian cultural history.

For a long time Indians themselves were neglecting this lofty heritage. It was like a long slumber of a lion. Fortunately due to the rediscovery of Indian philosophical treasure, by distinguished scholars like Max Muller, Monier Williams and a host of others, these original rich treasure Sanskrit literature, so long kept in the background got more or less revived.

Our national movements for renaissance and reformation also had their inspiration from these great works. Great Saints like Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Aurobindo and savants like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen and a host of other national leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak revived the spirit of these ancient literature—and fired fresher imaginations for a cultural revival in the whole of India. This cultural revival was, in fact the forerunner and served as a fresh impetus to the great freedom movement.

The influence of our ancient sages and their wisdom as depicted in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the message of Buddha, the *Light of Asia*, the sayings of Mahavira, the utterances of the great Sufi Saints, the secular Gurus of the Sikh religion, all inspired the newly awakened intelligentsia who created an urge for the great freedom movement. The influence of these scriptures, as reflected in later literature, spread by the great leaders both spiritual and political, have been described in a separate chapter. In fact, they need a greater and detailed discussion which, by itself, deserve study in depth.

ROLE OF MUSIC IN CULTURE

"Music" said Romain Rolland, "is the mirror of soul" of a nation. Indian music started with the chanting of the hymns of the *Vedas*. It is the most ancient music in the world. There are varieties of musical numbers, most famous among them being among the classical style, the *Dhrupada*, *Khyal* and *Tappa* and *Thungri*. Although *Carnataka* music, in its classical style originated in the South, today it has encompassed the whole of India.

Music has been playing a vital role in the entertainment of the people. It is a medium for purifying the soul. The most outstanding among the Indian musicians, Tansen was one of the *Nine Gems* during Akbar's rules. His Guru, Haridasa was a Saint who shunned any sort of publicity. He refused even invitation from Akbar the great and observed, "my music is not for kings or Emperors. They are meant only for God and God alone."

Amir Khusro, the Saint Poet invented the string instrument *Sitar*. Pandit Ravi Shankar brought laurels for this great instrument and performance thereon, the world over.

The South Indian Trinity—Purandara Dasa, Shama Diksitar, and Thyagaraja created an altogether different spiritual atmosphere through their highly classical songs in praise of God. In modern days M. S. Subb lakshmi, Juthika Ray, Lata Mangeshkar, the late Pankaj Mullick and Mukesh, Hemanta Mukherjee, Sagar Sen, Kalyanji Anandji, brought music to the door steps of the masses which so long got restricted only to the royal courts. Today it has reached the huts and hamlets of the people. Throughout India, the styles followed, known popularly as the *ghazanas* is the same. Indian music follows the same grammar throughout. The rhythm, the form and style are exactly the same. Only the folklore vary depending on the natural environments and a typical tune of the regions. For instance, *Baul* sung by mystic mendicants or *Bhatiali* sung mostly by the boatmen have their own local touches and local charms. A *Santoor* player of Kashmir is equally appreciated as a *Baul* musician

from Bengal. The *ragas* or *raginis* followed throughout India are the same.

India has the largest number of musical instruments. In only one team of Uday Shankar, the Indian Dance Wizard who stormed the world, had one hundred and ten musical instruments ! *Kirtans* and *Gazhals* are popular forms of music, the subject matter being either prayer to God or offering love to one's beloved

A detailed discussion on Music will follow in the next volume of the Book.

LOFTY LITERARY HERITAGE

The lofty literary heritage of India had enriched her culture for ages. More ancient than even Sanskrit was Tamil, one of the most ancient languages in the world. Some of the World's best classics like Kalidasas' *Abhijnan Shakuntalam*, epics like *Ramayana* by Valmiki and the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa form part of India's literary heritage. Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Gitanjali* was the first ever to win Nobel Prize in whole of Asia. The contribution of the great writers and poets which enriched the cultural heritage and natural integration of India and their roles in awakening the masses of India for struggle for freedom have already been described in the Author's other publications. The Book "*Towards National Unity and Integration*" contain a detailed chapter exclusively dealing with *Role of Poets in cultural unity** where the works of Amir Khusro, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Mirza Ghalib, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohammad Iqbal, Maithili Saran Gupta, Vallathol, Subramania Bharati, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bhai Vir Singh and others have been discussed at length. The role of great writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Munshi Prem Chand, Bharatendu Harischandra, Suryakant Nirala and a host of others have been discussed in detail in a separate Book by

*Please see Bhattacharya Vivek : *Towards National Unity and Integration* (pages 70-92), Metropolitan, New Delhi.

the Author in his Documented treatise *Awakened India : A Tryst with Destiny*.*

The most dynamic role in enriching the cultural heritage of India have been played by the great Saints of India who have carried the heritage from generation to generation, suffusing it deeply by their genuine touch of spirituality. Indian culture, without reference to the contribution of these great Sages and seers and their immortal messages of peace need a study in depth which has yet to be taken up. An honest effort was made by the author in his Book** exclusively dealing with the experiments and experiences of the Saints of India in the history of spirituality. How Indian literature is divine, how poets in almost all languages burst spontaneously into divine songs, how saints like Valmiki, Kabir, Nanak, Surdas, Tulsidas, Ravidas are discussed in the next Volume.

PAINTING, ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Indian painting is most ancient. It was discovered even during the Harappan civilisation. The cave paintings of Ajanta and Ellora have drawn attention of art lovers from all over the world.

Similarly, Indian architecture is unique in style. Architectural designs as old as five thousand years draw special interest of people in the field with great curiosity. Temples in India show varieties in style and form. Surprisingly, the architects never confined themselves only to ideals and ideas of any particular religious groups. In the Moghul architecture, for instance, there are noticeable traits—the lotus symbols which signified influence of the Hindu architects. Some of the finest examples of these are found in Delhi itself.

The Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world, the Jama Masjid (both in Delhi and Agra), the Moti Masjid

**Awakened India : A Tryst with Destiny* (pages 73-140, 170-194), Metropolitan, New Delhi.

***The Spirit of Indian Culture : Saints of India* with a foreword by Smt. Indira Gandhi, Metropolitan, New Delhi.

in Delhi, the Fatehpur Sikri structure in Agra are some of the finest specimens in the world. Similarly some of the South Indian temples at Madurai (a city of Temples), Rameshvaram, and Chidambaram, the Lord Jagannath Temple at Puri, the Parashnath Temple in Calcutta, the Temple carvings at Khajurao, the cave temples in Elephanta near Bombay, the topmost hill at Srinagar in Kashmir dedicated to Adi Shankaracharya, are things of eternal beauty which give you joy for ever. Even in modern architectures, the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta is a sight to appreciate. Similarly, the beautiful Belur Temple at Dakshinেশwara or the Dilwara Jain Temple at Mount Abu, are beautiful pieces of Indian architecture which form part and parcel of Indian culture and civilisation.

To sum up, the cultural heritage of India is a happy blend and synthesis of some of the wisest thoughts of sages and seers—past and present, the literary works and experiences and experiments of great many enlightened personalities of status who stand unique on their own rights. Indian culture presents the quintessence of their high thoughts in a capsule form.

To quote Rabindranath Tagore : “The main river of Indian culture has flowed in four streams—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, and the Jain. It had its source in the Indian heights of the consciousness.

“But a river belonging to a country is not fed by its own waters alone. Tibetan Brahmaputra mingles its water with the Indian Ganges. Contributions have similarly found their way to India’s original culture. The Muslim for example has repeatedly come into India from outside with his own store of knowledge and feeling and his wonderful religious democracy, bringing fresher and fresher, to swell the current. In our music, our architecture, our pictorial art, our literature, the Muslims have made their permanent and precious contribution. Those who have studied the lives and writings of our medieval saints, and all the

great religious movements that sprang up at the time of Muslim rule, know how deep is our debt to this foreign current that has so intimately mingled with our life."

And then has descended upon us the later flood of western culture, which bids fair to break through all banks and bounds, covering all other streams in its impetuous rush. If only we can provide a channel through which it may flow, we shall be saved from a deluge which otherwise may overwhelm us.

At our centres of Indian learning we must provide for the co-ordinated study of all these different cultures—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh, and the Zoroastrian. And side by side with them the European—for only then shall we be able to assimilate it.

(Tagore, Rabindranath : *Towards Universal Man*)

It would be wrong to surmise that Indians accepted ancient ideas and religious tenets blindly or without any question. That would be the greatest fallacy. They did question the authorities of the pronouncements. They raised similar question as Swami Vivekananda, in the beginning raised innumerable questions before Sri Ramakrishna, who would most patiently and coolly explain the subtleties of the inner quests. In a vast country like India with many great seers, it is but natural that there would be differences of opinion. Besides, even in the interpretation of some statements, there may be different explanations given by different and learned scholars.

The sages and seers themselves have had varied experiences. A learned one observed :

Srutirbibhinna, smritireba bhinna
Na ekṇ muniryasya bachoh pramanam
Dharmasya tatvang nihitang guhayang
Mahajano jeno gato sa pantha

This indeed has been the secret of the success of co-existence of so many faiths side by side without any clash of

opinion for centuries. Literally this *canto* means there are different schools of thoughts in our ancient scriptures. Their interpretation also varied. There has not been any single saint whose thought or idea could be accepted or taken for granted. The real knowledge of Truth revealed itself only in the (dark) caves. That meant one has to go to a cave and meditate there for attaining enlightened knowledge. Follow the path trodden by great sages and seekers of Truth in the past. That would be the right way. "Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime." They always left "footprints on the sands of time." Very clearly it reflected the highest teachings of Indian philosophy which drew its resource not from bookish knowledge but by perception, by deep inner enlightenment and inner culturing of the mind. That has been the reason why Indian culture and civilisation are undying, immortal and Truth personified.

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The Vedas—Earliest Holy Scriptures of the World

The *Vedas* are the most ancient and most sacred scriptures bequeathed to the entire civilization. *Rig Veda* is supposed to be the most popular and the earliest among any philosophical treatise in the whole world. It was mainly the wisdom, zeal and exploration of the great German philosopher scholar Max Muller that the most ancient literary genius of the *Vedas* could be introduced to the modern world.

As early as 1829, Max Muller published the earliest treatises, on the *Vedas*. He published in six volumes the *Rig Veda Samhita* with an extensive Sayana commentary. The whole world came to know the great secret of Indian mysticism. Appreciating this monumental work, Swami Vivekananda wrote in 1899, "The *Rig Veda Samhita* the whole of which no one could even get at before, is now very neatly printed and made accessible to the public, thanks to the Professor's prodigious labour extending over years. In the life of Prof. Max Muller the publication of the *Rig Veda* is a great event."

(Swami Vivekananda : *Collected Works*, Vol. IV,

To this single great western scholar the world in general and India in particular owe a rich debt of gratitude particularly in the realm of philosophy that no one else can rightly claim.

Not only the *Rig Veda*, Max Muller also translated the *Upanishad*. This one single devoted seer and philosopher wrote the secret of wisdom in his masterly Sacred Books of the East in fifty volumes. Paying handsome tribute to Max Muller for his contributions, the world Poet Rabindranath Tagore's illustrious father Maharshi Devendranath Tagore wrote, "By editing the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishads* you have made accessible to European Scholars the thoughts and aims of our old sages hidden hither to in illegible manuscripts". This painstaking, almost impossible task was undertaken by Max Muller mainly because of his greatest respect, reverence, appreciation for the cultural heritage of India. Appreciating this great gesture, Swami Vivekananda wrote, "And what love he bears towards India. I wish I had a hundred part of that love for my own Motherland."

Max Muller's acquaintance with the Indian philosophy and religious thought had not only modernised his views but also effected an inner conversion from an unshakable maintenance of Christian faith to the adoption of the *Vedanta* Philosophy.

It is quite uncertain when this great literature was written or compiled. As a scholar has rightly observed, "It is very difficult to determine the age of the *Vedas* and the time when they were actually written. According to Max Muller, the *Rig Veda* was composed around 1000 BC. According to Lokamanya Tilak, the *Rig Veda* appeared before 6000 BC, Winternitz has concluded that the earliest part of the *Vedas* was composed before 2000 or 2500 BC and the work was completed between 750 and 500 BC."

There are four major *Vedas*: *Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sama Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. They are further divided into three sections known as *Samhitas*. All these treatises reveal divine knowledge. The word *Veda* means knowledge: that is enlightened knowledge that is "Supreme" and divine.

The *Vedic* literature was presented through a systematic interpretation through the *Upanishad*. "The *Upanishads* mark the culmination of Indian thought." To be precise the *Upanishads*, *Aitareya* and *Kausitaki* belong to the *Rig Veda*. *Chandogya* and *Kena* belong to the *Sama Veda*. *Taittiriya Katha* and *Svetasvatra* belong to the *Krishna, Yajur Veda*. *Brihadaranyaka* and *Isa* belong to the *Sukla Yajur Veda* and *Prasna*, *Mundaka* and *Mandukya* belong to the *Atharva Veda*. A scholar respectfully and with a sense of deep reverence has recorded, "What inspires us with the highest respect for these ancient thinkers of India is the earnestness and enthusiasm with which they endeavoured to fathom the divine principle."

The most important among the *Vedas* is the *Rig Veda*. It is considered to be the most ancient revelation of divine knowledge through realised spiritual pathfinders. It consists of 1,028 hymns with nearly 10,500 verses. "The hymns are addressed to Gods such as *Agni*, *Indra*, *Varuna*." It is "the foundation of all Vedic literature. It consists of lyrics mainly in praise of different Gods, and their contents are largely mythological. It represents a stage of development of the human mind in which natural phenomena were personified into Gods."

It is certain that in ancient India there was no idolatry. The whole society worshipped only Nature. "These hymns are of great value to us as an expression of the oldest religious faith of the Aryans in India. As works of art, too they deserve a prominent place in world literature. There are also hymns in the *Rig Veda* where we find references to the themes of life after death and destiny of soul, along with philosophical speculation on the Universe and its creation."

The *Sama Veda* derives main stanzas (except 75) from the *Rig Veda*. The *Sama Veda* formed the first introduction of music in India and perhaps the whole world. It is a book of chants.

The *Yajur Veda* consists of *mantras* for the purpose of recitation and the rules to be observed at the time of sacrifice is designated as *Yajur Veda Samhita*. The *Veda* is written in

prose, and is very much unlike the *Rig Veda* which is entirely in verses.

The trinity of the *Vedas* popularly known as *Trayi* consists of *Rig Veda*, *Sama Veda*, and *Yajur Veda* and are considered as the main holy scriptures. The *Atharva Veda* is not considered so highly religious and philosophical because it consists of ideas guiding to black magic. It deals with witchcraft and is studied by people with lower thoughts.

To explain the deeply philosophical thoughts of the *Vedas* the sages wrote guides to these divine books. They are known as *Vedangas*. To understand the *Vedas* properly one must go through the *Vedangas* first. They are six in number :

1. *Siksha* (Phonetics)
2. *Kalpa* (Ritual)
3. *Vyakarana* (Grammar)
4. *Nirukta* (Etymology)
5. *Chhandas* (Metre) and
6. *Jyotisa* (Astronomy)

According to the *Vishnu Purana*, "the original *Veda*, first revealed by God to the *Rishis* consisted of one hundred thousand verses and had four divisions."

The *Rig Veda* is undoubtedly the most ancient of the ancient scriptures of the world. "More than the other scriptures of the world, the *Vedas* make a special claim to be divine in their origin. The *Bible*, the *Koran* and other revelations of the word of God owe their authority to delivery of the sacred message through an angel, or prophet, or other special messenger from God to certain chosen persons. And these revelations must be accepted on faith." Swami Prabhavananda noted, "No question is raised as to whether any human being today can verify these revelations in his own experience. The *Vedas* on the other hand, are said to be *apauruseya*, which means divine in origin." Sayanacharya, an authority on the *Vedas* observed, "God created the whole Universe out of the knowledge of *Vedas*." It means the concept of the *Vedas* is

older than the existence of the Universe. “*Vedic* knowledge existed even before the creation of mankind.” It is confirmed by all ancient sages and seers and modern learned commentators that “the authorities of the *Vedas* do not depend upon anything external. They themselves are authorities being the knowledge of God.”

This means that a sage or a seer in his deep concentration or transcendental meditation became one with the *Brahman* or the *Atman* became identical with the Infinite. At that moment whatever he uttered about his personal experiment or experience obviously became divine. It was accepted by all as the utterances of God, personified in the sages.

Vedas consist only of realised enlightened knowledge. That is the greatest sanctity of the holy scripture.

THE SUBTLE SECRET

The greatest authority on the *Rig Veda*, Professor Max Muller gives us details about the secret of the philosophical fervour. He explained it thus. There are in fact three religions in the *Veda*, or if I may say so, three naves in one great temple, reared as it were, before our eyes by poets, prophets, and philosophers. Here, too, we can watch the work and the workmen. We have not to deal with hard formulas only, with unintelligible ceremonies, or petrified fetishes. We can see how the human mind arrives by a perfectly rational process at all its later irrationalities. This is what distinguishes the *Veda* from all other Sacred Books. Much, no doubt, in the *Veda* also, and in the Vedic ceremonial, is already old and unintelligible, hard and petrified. But in many cases the development of names and concepts, their transition from the natural to the supernatural, from the individual to the general, is still going on, and it is for that very reason that we find it so difficult, nay almost impossible, to translate the growing thoughts of the *Veda* into the full-grown and more than full-grown language of our time.

Prof. Max Muller further observed : Let us take one of the oldest words for god in the *Veda*, such as *deva*, the Latin

deus. The dictionaries tell you that *deva* means god and gods, and so, not doubt, it does. But if we always translated *deva* in the *Vedic* hymns by god, we should not be translating, but completely transforming the thoughts of the *Vedic* poets. I do not mean only that our idea of God is totally different from the idea that was intended to be expressed by *deva* ; but even the Greek and Roman concept of gods would be totally inadequate to convey the thoughts imbedded in the *Vedic deva*. *Deva* meant originally bright, and nothing else. Meaning bright, it was constantly used of the sky, the stars, the sun, the dawn, the day, the spring, the rivers, the earth; and when a poet wished to speak of all of these by one and the same word—by what we should call a general term—he called them all *Devas*. When that had been done, *Deva* did no longer mean ‘the Bright ones,’ but the name comprehended all the qualities which the sky and the sun and the dawn shared in common, excluding only those that were peculiar to each.

We now come to the second nave of the *Vedic* temple, the second Beyond that was dimly perceived and grasped and named by the ancient *Rishis*, namely the world of the Departed Spirits.

There was in India, as elsewhere, another very early faith, springing up naturally in the hearts of the people, that their fathers and mothers, when they departed this life, departed to a Beyond, wherever it might be.

The *Vedas* were meant for all. In fact there are hymns which mention it clearly that God almighty must shower His blessings to one and all. But the greatest difficulty was that it was beyond the comprehension, realisation and understanding of the ordinary mind. It was indeed quite difficult a drill to follow. So it had to be restricted only to a select few.

Another handicap was the absence of a proper preceptor. Without proper guidance the deeper inner meanings of the *Vedas* could not be comprehended or revealed. This knowledge, it must be specifically noted, was not just bookish know-

ledge that it could be transmitted by a teacher. The secret was to be acquired by a disciple through austere practice of meditation and concentration. It could not be possible to be shared by all, although, with the best of their intentions, the sages meant it for one and all.

In fact, in its tone and tenor, matter and text, this most ancient holy scripture teaches one to think democratically. One of the oft quoted hymns of the *Rig Veda* which was adopted by Tagore as a prayer song for his world University at Santiniketan clearly reflect this deep democratic touch in its contents. The prayer, since, has been translated into a number of languages and rendered into beautiful songs by eminent noted musicians of the country including the late Pankaj Mullick. The hymn intones :

Common be your prayer
Common be your end
Common be your deliberations
Common be your desires
United be your hearts
United be your intentions
Perfect be the union among you.

Such a majestic lofty idea, realised five thousand years ago may be the motto of great world forum like the United Nations. There is hardly any such relevant and yet so ancient thought for the uplift of humankind.

As *Gangotri* is the source of the sacred river *Ganga* so is the sacred *Veda* the source of all religious thinking in India. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan aptly remarked, "A study of the hymns of the *Rig Veda* is indispensable for any adequate account of Indian thought.

True, the ideas were difficult. Equally true also is the fact that the general masses had hardly any access to it but that task was made easier by the later sages, who in their wisdom, blended with their divine realisations presented their lofty divine thoughts through the *Upanishads* and later on the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. It was easier for the general public

to understand these thoughts. Being drenched in spiritual thoughts and having deep philosophical moorings, it was not at all so complex or difficult to the people of India in general and the Truth Seekers in particular to whole heartedly welcome these easier versions or interpretations of the *Vedas* as presented through the *Upanishads*.

The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* are identical. The former is the main text. The latter an easier interpretation of the same. Similarly the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is a continuation of the *Upanishadic* thoughts. In fact, there are Scholars who treat both the *Upanishads* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* also as identical. Many have described the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* as another *Upanishad*. There are many versions of the *Gita* where after each chapter, the commentator concluded by saying that this chapter of the *Gita Upanishad* come to a close.

In brief, all the lofty divine thoughts of Indian philosophy derive their origin from the *Vedas*.

The *Rig Veda* as mentioned among the greatest of the scholars—modern and ancient—convincingly record it as “the earliest book of the human race.” Swami Ranganathananda wrote, “In the midst of the enjoyments and delights of social existence, the finer spirits, of the age asking searching questions about nature, man and the gods, thus laying the foundations of a dynamic and comprehensive philosophy which was to find its full development in the *Upanishads* or *Vedanta* a few centuries later.”

The ideas of the sages varied. But there was one common link, the unity of the Godhead. It was in the utterances of the *Rig Veda* that we first heard the message of co-existence when it universally declared without any hesitation *ekam sad vipra bahudha vadanti*—Truth is one, Saints and sages call it by various names.

Equality of man, dignity of man, searching for the unknown and proper value judgment were the highlights of this great Vedic approach to the great experiment it had undergone for exploring the Secret of the divine light.

The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* form the mainstream of the vast Indian philosophy. The ancient Aryan culture is fully reflected in the thoughts as expressed in these *Trinities*. In fact they are not three but are divided for easier access to the ordinary scholar." The *Vedas* teach the knowledge of God, and lay down work as a means to that knowledge—the word work here signifying both sacrificial rites and unselfish performance of secular duty. When through work our hearts are purified, we are ripe for divine knowledge. Work and knowledge—these two are subjects of the *Vedas*."

The greatest teacher of *Rig Veda* never missed a chance to express his views on the ancient scripture which almost entered into his views. In a memorable lecture on *Veda* and *Vedanta*, Max Muller went to the extent of asking to be excused for going into the intricate details of the *Rig Veda*. There the saintly scholar observed, "My object was, not merely to place names and facts before you, these you can find in many published books but if possible, to make you see and feel the general human interests that are involved in that ancient chapter of the history of human race. It wished that the *Veda* and its religion and philosophy should not only seem to you curious or strange, but that something that concern ourselves, something of our own intellectual growth, some recollections, as it were our of own childhood of our own race. It feel convinced that placed as we are here in this life, we have lessons to learn from the *Veda*, quite as the lessons we learn from Homer and Virgil, and lessons from the *Vedanta* quite as instructive as the systems of Plato or Spinoza."

Who else has had ever appreciated Indian scriptures so lovingly, with so great reverence and deep feelings of emotions? No wonder Swami Vivekananda once said that we have not a fraction of love for our own cultural heritage that Max Muller had for Indian Culture, specially the *Rig Veda*.

There are different versions about the origin of the *Rig Veda*. Quoting one such version, Swami Prabhavananda

noted that "how the god Brahma was once meditating on his creator when there was manifested within the shrine of his heart the eternal word *Om*—the seed of all knowledge and of all thought. One by one were also manifested the sounds of all the letters, and through these letters there became known unto *Brahma* the wisdom of the *Vedas*. Then in order to spread this knowledge through the world he taught it to his disciples—to Marichi Atri, Angiras, and others—and these in turn to the world around them. In this fashion did the *Vedas* become known to all mankind."

(Swami Prabhavananda : *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 28)

Nobody can ever master the *Vedas* without a proper preceptor. This is not only according to the tradition or connection but strictly according to the instructions laid down in the *Vedas* themselves, "Approach a teacher with humility and with a desire to serve." It is also observed. To many it is not given to hear of the Self. Many, though they hear of it, do not understand it. Wonderful is he who speaks of it; intelligent is he who learns of it. Blessed is he, who taught by a good teacher, is able to understand it."

A good teacher not only explains the scriptures, the spirit as well as the letter but more importantly he teaches, by his own life, by his own demeanour daily acts, by his most casual words, sometimes even by his silence. "Only to be near him, only to serve and obey him, in humility and reverence, is to become quickened in spirit; and the purpose of the study of the *Vedas* is not merely primarily to inform the intellect, but to purify and enrich the soul." The pleasure derived out of the study of the *Vedas* is manifold—both learning and teaching the *Vedas* lead to deep concentration, of mind. "The person is no longer a slave to his passion. Devout, Self controlled, cultivated in spirit, he rises to fame, himself becomes a blessing to humankind."

Max Muller wrote convincingly, "Writing was unknown in India before the fourth century before Christ, and yet we are asked to believe that the *Vedic* literature in its three well

defined periods, the *Mantra*, *Brahmana* and *Sutra* periods goes back to at least a thousand years before our era."

Then how was it possible ? Max Muller himself ventured the reply. "The entire *Rig Veda* containing ten books of hymns consisting of 1028 poems, 10,580 verses and more than 1,53,826 words had spread from mouth to mouth ! The whole thing went from person to person only by memory. Max Muller admitted, "This may sound startling but what will sound still more startling, and yet is a fact that can easily be ascertained by anybody who doubts it—at the present moment, if every MSS of the *Rig Veda* were lost, we should be able to recover the whole of it—from the memory of the *Stotriyas* in India "

Who are these *Stotriyas* ? In India, we have students who learned the *Vedas* by heart. They all recited in groups and were taught by a preceptor or *Acharya* who took special care of their accents, phonetics and even pauses at the particular spots. So the students learned the *Veda* from the mouth of their Guru, never from a MS, still less from printed books. These students, in turn imparted the same education to their pupils.

Max Muller recorded, "I have had such students in my room at Oxford who not only could repeat these hymns, but who repeated them with the proper accent (for the *Vedic* Sanskrit has accents like Greek) nay, when looking through my printed edition of the *Rig Veda*, could point out a misprint without the slightest hesitation."

(Max Muller : *India, What can it Teach*, p. 181)

This memorising need special training. It was much more precise and perfect than modern electronic machines like computers.

There is a reason for that. To quote Max Muller again "Of course, this learning by heart is carried on under a strict discipline ; it is in fact, considered as a sacred duty. A learned friend of mine, himself a distinguished *Vedic* Scholar, tells me that a boy who is to be brought up as a student of the *Rig Veda* has to spend about eight years in the

house of his teacher. He has to learn ten books : first the hymns of the *Rig Veda*; then a prose treatise on sacrifices called the *Brahmana*; then the so-called Forest—book or *Aranyaka*; then the rule of the domestic ceremonies; and lastly, six treatises on pronunciation, grammar, etymology, metre, astronomy, and ceremonial.”

(*Ibid*, p. 182)

Max Muller had known the future ! With his deep love for India and her *Rig Veda*, the saintly Scholar in a lecture lamented, “I doubt whether it will last much longer, and I always impress on my friends in India, and therefore impress on those also who will soon be settled as civil servants in India, the duty of trying to learn all that can still be learnt from those living libraries. Much ancient Sanskrit love will be lost for ever when that race of *Stotriyas* become extinct.”

That is exactly what is going to happen today. We have to revive the love and devotion for our own lofty cultural heritage. *Rig Veda* is the gem—the brightest of all and somehow has to be preserved, if not through mouth to mouth in details at least in its substance and theme ! It will be a colossal loss and denial of rights to know their own cultural heritage if our pupils are not taught the basic ideas inherent in the *Rig Veda*.

THE YAJUR VEDA

The *Yajur Veda* is, by and large, a treatise narrated entirely in prose. There are of course occasional metrical passages. But they are only quotations from the *Rig Veda* which is the source of all other later scriptures. There are also variations in reading. According to Prof. Basham the *Yajur Veda* was compiled a century or two later than *Rig Veda*.

The *Yajur Veda* is smaller in size to *Rig Veda*. In fact it will be hardly two thirds of the *Rig Veda*. We are told, “while the *Rig Veda* with its hymns addressed to the deities starts with a prayer “I worship the Fire placed in front, the

Yajur Veda has short prose passage in the form of formulas addressed to the articles used in the rituals." It says, "For the fulfilment of my desire I welcome Thee". This *mantra* is addressed to "a twig of the *palasa* tree (*The Flame of Forest*). When it is cut which is one of the preliminary rites of the new and full moon sacrifices."

The *Veda* also includes passages addressing the knife. "O Knife do not hurt him" or "O Stones listen". It means, unlike the *Rig Veda* where the *mantras* are addressed to nature, in the *Yajur Veda*, the sages included also the inanimate objects. In the *Yajur Veda*, "sacrificial formulas and prayers are interspersed with explanatory passages in the *Black Yajur Veda* while the white contains only sacrificial formulas."

THE ATHARVA VEDA

The *Atharva Veda* introduces "a new note. There the picture is not at all bright. "There we find signs of a gloomier side in man's life." The *Atharva Veda* by and large consists of black magic. It gives *mantras* also to injure some person, including one's enemies and various other aspects of life which are definitely all negative sides of spirituality. In fact many scholars have expressed their doubts clearly. A great scholar has recorded, "There is considerable scope for dispute regarding the claim of the *Atharva Veda* to be counted as a *Veda* at all". Even many learned Indian Philosophers only mention the three other *Vedas*. This included Jaimini in his *Mimamsa Sutra* defining only the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda* ignoring altogether the *Atharva Veda* "which has no place in the sacrifices." And yet it must be recalled there are scholars who give it a high place. "There are two with fair wings knit with bonds of Union" which has been the basic text for latter day Indian philosophy : regarding the relation between the Supreme Soul and the Individual Soul occurring in the *Atharva Veda*. In the *Raghuvansa* where the King Dilipa goes to his teacher Vashistha to consult him on very important State matters, Kalidasa refers to Vashistha as the repository of *Atharva* Knowledge or *Atharva nidhi*. According to modern

western scholars like Prof. A.L. Basham it "was certainly compiled after the *Rig* and *Yajur*." Although considered as only devoted to black magic including special *mantras* to spread a spell on some one or propitiate the deity for personal prosperity the whole book is in verses. According to Prof. Basham, "It possesses however, an atmosphere of simple animism and sympathetic magic, and seems to reflect a lower cultural level than that of the *Rig Veda*, deriving from the plebeian religion of the Aryans and containing many non-Aryan elements."

Interestingly enough, the situation as it stands today is mainly in the South of India that the culture of deep study of the *Vedas* is still alive. In the North it is almost extinct.

Prof. Basham, somewhere also, mentions that "Much of the *Rig Veda* is imperfectly understood." This is a wrong approach. It is from the *Rig Veda* that all the later *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* derived their main inspiration. That is the main source. The other later literature had been duly connoted, interpreted, explained in simpler expressions. The original *Rig Veda* needs special study. After one goes through the monumental works by Max Muller and that too most attentively it would normally be not beyond one's comprehension to follow the *Rig Veda*.

The *Atharva Veda* mentions a class of early ascetic known as *Vratya*. Prof. Basham feels, "this term (*Vratya*) in its later broad meaning implied an Aryan, who had fallen from the faith and no longer respected the *Vedas* ; but the *Vratya* of the *Atharva Veda* was a priest of non-Vedic fertility cult, which involved ritual dancing and flagellation. He travelled from place to place in a cart, with a woman whom he prostituted and a musician who performed for him at his rites."

(Basham A.L. : *Op. cit.*, pp. 245-46)

THE SAMA VEDA

The *Sama Veda* is musical. The whole *Vedic* hymns can be sung. It is entirely metrical. It is smaller in size to *Yajur*

Veda and the *Rig Veda*. To be precise it is just half the size of the *Rig Veda*. The *Sama Veda* culls a considerable part from the *Rig Veda*. The *Vedas*, “internal arrangement follow the sequence of the sacrifices.

Whereas the *Atharva Veda* is divided into twenty sections, the *Rig Veda* devotes greater position of its use in sacrifices, in the *Yajur Veda* and the *Sama Veda* “the entire purpose is sacrificial.”

Although mostly metrical it contains also prose pieces. In the *Atharva Veda* “we meet with charms and spells, to drive away diseases, to injure the enemy, to bring prosperity and long life to the King”. Unlike the *Atharva Veda*, *Sama Veda* is devoted only to prayers of the Almighty.

There is a freshness in the very utterances of the *Sama Vedic* hymns. The *Rig Vedic* and the *Sama Vedic* hymns used to be chanted, loudly. The entire *Chandogya* and *Kena Upanishads*, which too can be chanted sweetly is derived from the *Sama Veda* whereas *Aitareya* and *Kaustaki Upanishads* belong to the *Rig Veda*. *Isa* and *Taittiriye* and the *Bṛhad-aranyaka* belong to the *Yajur* and *Prasna* and *Mundaka* to the *Atharva Veda*.

We shall discuss these *Upanishads* in another chapter. Prof. Basham has not given much importance to *Sama Veda*. He observed “The *Sama Veda* is almost useless to the historian, being a collection of certain verses of the *Rig Veda* arranged for liturgical purposes.”

The true foundation of Indian Culture—Unity in diversity and co-existence originates in the 46th verse of the hymn of *Dirghatamas*. *Ekam Sad Vipra bahudha Vadanti* (Truth is one ; sages call it by various names).

The Cultural Heritage of India (Vol. I) records clearly “while dealing with the gods of the *Vedas*, *Yaska*, says that there is only one God. On earth (*prithivi-sthana*), He appears as the Fire, in the mid region (*antariksa sthana*), as *Indra*; and in the celestial region (*dyu-sthana*), as *Savitri*. The various gods in

each of these three planes are only aspects of these three manifestations of the one God (*Nirukte*).

The *Veda* says, this one God as Fire on earth, functions as the messenger to bring the gods to the sacrifices and to carry oblations to them. He is the spokesman of the gods. "He mediates between gods and man. He is the Lord of the home and the bestower of worldly benefits."

Time and again Prof. Max Muller had raised the question about the exact date of *Rig Veda*. Finally, he wrote, "We must return once more to the question of dates. We have traced the existence of the *Veda*, as handed down by oral tradition, from our days to the days of *I-tsing* in the seventh century after Christ, and again to the period of the *Pratisakhya*s, in the fifth century before Christ.

In that fifth century B.C. took place the rise of Buddhism, a religion built up on the ruins of the *Vedic* religion, and founded, so to say, on the denial of the divine authority ascribed to the *Veda* by all orthodox *Brahmans*.

"Whatever exists therefore of *Vedic* literature must be accommodated within the centuries preceding the rise of Buddhism, and if I tell you that there are three periods of *Vedic* literature to be accommodated the third presupposing the second, and the second the first, and that even that first period presents us with a collection, and a systematic collection of *Vedic* hymns. I think you will agree with me that it is from no desire for an extreme antiquity, but simply from a respect for facts, that students of the *Veda* have come to the conclusion that these hymns, of which the MSS, do not carry us back beyond the fifteenth century after Christ, took their origin in the fifteenth century before Christ."

Prof. A.L. Basham too in this masterly *The Wonder that was India* noted, "The *Rig Veda* which is the oldest religious text in the world still looked on as sacred, and which was probably composed between 1500 and 900 BC."

(Basham A.L. : *The Wonder that was India*, p 234)

Prof Basham compared the *Vedic* gods with those of the Greeks, "The early gods of the Aryans like those of the Greeks were chiefly connected with the sky and were predominantly male. A few goddesses occur in the *Rig Veda*; for instance *Prithivi* a vague and rarely mentioned personification of the earth; *Aditi*, a mysterious and tenuous figure, the great mother of the Gods, *Usha* the Goddess of dawn, to whom a number of lovely hymns were addressed, *Ratri* the spirit of the night who has a beautiful hymn to herself, and *Aranyani*, the Lady of the Forest, a nature Goddess of little importance who is praised in one very late hymn; none of these however, played a significant part in the cult."

(*Ibid*, p 235)

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The Upanishads

The word *Upanishad* signifies "any of a number of Sanskrit theosophic philosophical treatises." *Upa* means near, and *nisad* means sitting down. So *Upanishad* means, literally sitting down near devotedly. It symbolised discipleship or studenthood. One can visualise a mental picture of a disciple sitting at the feet of the master, earnestly to learn the art of God-realisation from the *Guru*. In fact, Bhagwan Shankaracharya defined *Upanishad* as "knowledge of God". *Upanishad* also means "Secret teaching, secret no doubt, because a teaching vouchsafed only to those who are spiritually ready to receive it and profit by it.

Dr. Radhakrishnan in his scholarly *Indian Philosophy*. (Vol. 1) noted :

"The word *Upanishad* comes from *upa ni sad*, "sitting down near." It means 'sitting down near' to the teacher to receive instruction. It gradually came to mean what we receive from the teacher, a sort of secret doctrine or *rahasyam*. Sometimes it is made to mean what enables us to destroy error, and approach truth. Shankara, in his introduction to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, observed : "Knowledge of *Brahman* is called *Upanishad*

because in the case of those who devote themselves to it the bonds of conception, birth, decay, etc., become unloosed, or because it destroys them altogether, or because it leads the pupil very near to *Brahman*, or because therein the highest God is seated.”

According to Shankaracharya, “It pointed to the central subject of that portion of the *Vedas* which it has named. It was the end of the *Vedas*. It was also observed that “since they brought to a close each of the four *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* come to be spoken of often as the *Vedanta* the *anta* or end of *Vedas*.” Here the word *anta* is deeply significant. It is “like the related and has in addition to its literal meaning, the figurative meaning of goal or purpose.”

According to Swami Prabhavananda, “Thus it is that when a modern Hindu speaks of *Vedanta* he may have both senses more or less in mind, the scriptures referred to being for the last part of the *Vedas* and at the same time their ultimate reason for existence, their perfect culmination—in a word, their highest wisdom.”

This is an enlightened definition and description of *Vedanta* by an eminent saintly scholar, Prabhavananda. He was a direct disciple of Swami Brahmananda, the *Manasputra* (adopted son) of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa—who spread the message of *Vedanta* to the west, specially the United States of America for more than fifty years.

There are many commentaries on *Upanishads*. The most authentic among them undoubtedly has been by Bhagwan Shankaracharya.

It opens with a description of the Almighty God. “God is supreme being, is Infinite. If from the Infinite one takes Infinite he too mingles into the Infinite.”

According to Swami Gambhirananda, the present learned President of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math, Belur, “all *Upanishads* exhaust themselves simply by determining the true nature of Self, and the *Gita* and the scriptures dealing with *Moksha* (the emancipation of soul) have only this in view.

Accordingly all *karmas* have enjoined by assuming such qualities for the Self as multiplicity, agentship, enjoyership etc. and-impurity, sinfulness, etc., which common sense takes for granted."

The exact number of *Upanishads* is still a mystery. The total number is not known even to the most informed scholar. However we have evidence of well preserved one hundred and eight volumes of the *Upanishads*.

Who have written these masterpieces? When were they written? In the absence of the print medium, scriptures like the *Upanishads*, used to spread from mouth to mouth. They were mostly recited loudly. The preceptor would take a limited number of students. They would recite these hymns loudly. Memo. : because of this constant culture, used to be quite sharp. So written manuscripts were a rarity.

The *Upanishads* have been preserved mainly by traditions. The saintly authors have not been known for two reasons. These sages had nowhere identified their authorship. It must have been innumerable. They vary in contents and patterns of presentation of the mystic messages. Some were in the serious mood, some resonant in vigour, some in prose. Some of these *Upanishads* also have touches of humour. "In style and manner they vary widely, often within the same *Upanishad*, being now simply and concretely narrative, now subtly and abstractly expository, often assuming, in either case, a dialogue form. Their tone too fluctuates, the characteristic seriousness and elevation finding occasional relief in homely humour." They varied according to the mood and nature of the sages who composed them. There could be no iota of doubt that those who composed these literary pieces were all enlightened *Rishis* completely indifferent about their own authorship or separate identity. They did it in a noble way because they had already got rid of *Ahang jnan* or egotism. So all the *Upanishadic* hymns are treated and considered as *Songs of God*.

In his divine wisdom Bhagwan Shankaracharya selected only sixteen *Upanishads* as "authentic and authoritative." He himself wrote commentaries on at least ten of them. The other six

are also referred to in his treatises. He made use of excerpts from them. The main *Upanishads*, accepted as authentic and authoritative are:

(1) *Isa*. (2) *Kena*. (3) *Katha*. (4) *Prasna*. (5) *Mundaka* (6) *Man-dukya* (7) *Chandogya*. (8) *Brihadaranyaka*, (9) *Aitareya* (10) *Taittiriya*.

Surprisingly enough although all the hundred and eight *Upanishads* can never be accepted as the composition of any one particular sage, the main current of thinking in all the volumes seem to be almost identical. There are hardly any contradictory statements. The styles vary but not the contents. The presentations vary but not the pattern of thinking. They discuss different aspects of God-realisation. They reach almost to the same conclusion. This common under-current of thinking among the sages—whose timings are merely matter of guess work—is almost similar. There is no dichotomy or inter contradictory expression anywhere. In fact the approach is so homogenous and uniform that one has to accept the whole literature as harping on one and the same tune. While studying the *Upanishads*, one must clearly remember that because the ideas came from different sages and seers of different times, except one common theme of *God-realisation* there is nothing common link in thoughts. Although the literature is spread over thousands of pages, forming as many as one hundred and eight volumes of the book, these scholars or enlightened sages do not represent any particular school of thought. It is very much like ancient Indian History which is not recorded with precision and facts. And yet they are deeply meaningful because the sages give these hymns from their own personal realisation. They have definitely “seen” the divine light as many of them have expressed in their compositions. It may not form any particular system of thought or school also because of the fact that they cover a much bigger and wider horizon. The Truth they discovered, rather explored after long spiritual experiment is of universal appeal. So, criticism by some learned scholars that the *Upanishads* do not represent any school of thought is not only untenable but also a meaningless charge. It is just like measuring the vastness of the limitless sky. The limitlessness of the Universe, for instance,

form part of many of the *Upanishadic* utterances. The appeal is not restricted to the Hindu religion or any sect. It is applicable and valid universally.

THE SALIENT FEATURES

We may discuss some of the salient features of them. We shall restrict ourselves only to ten as explained by Shankaracharya.

1. ISA UPANISHAD

This great *Upanishad* starts in right earnest. It decries all sorts of lusts, greed and materialistic gain.

*Isa Vasyam Idam Sarvang
Yat Kimcha jagatyam jagat
i ena tyaktiena bhunjithah
Ma gridhah kashya shvid dhanam*

The Supreme ruler is dwelling in your heart. He is the Supreme self of all. He is all pervading. The Lord is in His true form as the Self and should be covered. Covered what ? All this whatsoever on earth. That means all this is to be covered by one's own self. The Lord, through His Supreme reality, present in the realisation, as the indwelling (Self of all), I am all this: all that is unreal, whether moving or not moving, is to be covered by its own Supreme Self. Finally the interpretation is "The Self is to be saved through firm devotedness; the knowledge of the Self after the renunciation of the three-fold desire for sons etc. As for the other person who is unable to cognise the Self because of his mental preoccupation with the non-Self." Through the thought of the Lord all worldly things are to be renounced. "Do not have any hankering for things that are unreal." So *Isa Upanishad* started with the first all important, frequently quoted *canto* which invoke "All this whatsoever moves on the earth should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through that detachment, Do not covet anybody's wealth." It also means, "Do not covet for whose is wealth ?"

This important treatise next stresses on unattached *Karma*. "By doing *Karma* indeed should one wish to live here for a

hundred years ? For a man, such as you (who wants to live thus), there is no, nay other than this, whereby *Karma* may not cling to you."

The *Upanishad* continues on *Self* purification through non-attachment. "Those worlds of devils are covered by blinding darkness. Those people that kill the *Self* go to them after giving up this body". This is an important utterance since it signifies the concept of transmigration and is warning man to lead the path of enlightenment. Because men of knowledge are freed from rebirth.

Isa Upanishad lays stress on ethical code of conduct more than any other *Upanishads*. It broadens one's outlook by self culturing. It observes, "He who sees all beings in the very *Self*, and the *Self* in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realisation).

Such a person gets rid of sorrow. "When to the man of realisation all beings become the very *Self*, then what delusion and what sorrow can that be for that seer of oneness." This meant, to an enlightened man, every man is identical with him. He finds himself in all men and his *Self* spreads over all human-kind. Can there be a better motto than this for universal code of conduct for all nations ?

What is ideal *Self* ? The *Isa Upanishad* advocates, such an individual must be to face with the "all pervasive, pure, bodiless, without wound, without face sinews, taintless, untouched by sin, omniscient, ruler of mind, transcendent and self-existent the has duly allotted the (respective) duties to the eternal creators called by that name."

Sri Ramakrishna always used to talk of *Vidya* and *Avidya*. By *Vidya* he meant only that knowledge through which one can get God-realisation. The other one *avidya* was merely bookish knowledge or ignorance. The *Isa Upanishad* records, "He knows these two-*Vidya* and *avidya*-together, attains immediately through *Vidya* by crossing over death through *avidya*."

Isa Upanishad assigns highest reverence to Fire God *Agni*. "O Fire : O God ! knowing as thou do, all our deeds, lead us

by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruits of our deeds ; remove from us all crooked sins. We offer thee many words of salutation.”

Although the whole ancient Aryan religious rituals are connected with praising or worshipping the different manifestations of Nature, the *Vedic* literature assigns highest reverence for Fire i. e. *Agni*. There is no *mantra* where offering is not done to Fire—*Agnaye Swaha*.

In brief, according to *Isa Upanishad*, “In the heart of all things of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord.”

2. KENA UPANISHAD

From *Isa Upanishad* let us turn our attention to *Kena Upanishad*. This divine scripture surrenders to the Almighty *Brahman*. “Since He is the ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the intelligent men, after giving up (self-identification with the senses) and renouncing this world become immortal.”

Unlike in some *Upanishads* where the description of the divinity and the Infinite is clear-cut, here the sage expresses his difficulties or doubts about guiding one for God-realisation. It says, “The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor mind. We do not know (*Brahman* to be such and such); hence we are not aware of any process of instructing about it.”

Dr. Radhakrishnan in his *Indian Philosophy*. Vol. I, recorded “In *Kena Upanishad* the pupil asks, ‘at whose wish does the mind send forth proceed on its errand ? At whose command does the first breath go forth, at whose do we utter the speech. What God directs the eye or the ear ?’” Dr. Radhakrishnan quoted also the earlier canto on the exploring or searching the *Brahman*. He observed “the ultimate reality (i.e. the *Brahman*) cannot be made an objective representation which the intellect can grasp.”

This is the eternal puzzle. It cannot be solved by intellect, pure and simple.

The sage Yagnavalka, perhaps quite rightly warned the searcher for Truth when he observed, “Ask not too much.”

Later on, Radhakrishnan quoted *Kena Upanishad* again when he described the *Brahman*. "Positive features (of the *Brahman*) are revealed when *Brahman* is intuited. *Kena Upanishad*, itself described that intuitive perception and noted "it is subtler than the subtle, greater than the great." The same *Upanishad* finally observes, it is (the knowledge of the *Brahman*) not known to those who know and known to those who do not know. *Kena Upanishad* says, "that (*Brahman*) is surely different from the known; and again, It is above the unknown". It also says, later on, "that which is not uttered by speech, that by which speech is revealed, know that alone to be *Brahman*, and not what people worship as an object." A later statement of the sage clears the doubt and observed that all these difficulties are there to realise the *Brahman* because He is beyond comprehension. As Radhakrishnan has explained in one word that need *intuition*. "That which man does not comprehend with the mind, that by which, they say, the mind is encompassed know that to be *Brahman* not what people worship as an object."

In the same vein the sage says, *Brahman* cannot be seen. He can only be perceived. "It is only a perception through intuition. That which man does not see with the activities of the eye, know that alone to be *Brahman* and not what people worship as an object."

Kena Upanishad gives a proper and definite guidance for conciliation which is the first prerequisite for God-realisation specially drawing our attention to this guideline, Dr. Radhakrishnan recorded, "the way to reach steadiness of mind is by concentration or fixing the thought for a time on one particular object by effacing all others. Only practice helps us to grow perfect in this art". Mystic words such as *Aum* (Om), *Tadvanam* are the symbols on which we are to fix attention."

The particular canto referred to in chapter IV (Number four) "the *Brahman* is well known as the one adorable to all creatures. Hence it is to be meditated on with the help of the name *Tadvanam*. All creatures surely pray to anyone who meditates in this way".

Tadvanam means *tasya* (his) *vanam* (Adorable)

Kena Upanishad ends with guidance on realisation of the *Brahman*. That lies "Concentration, cessation from sense-objects, rites, etc. are its legs ; the *Vedas* are all its limbs : Truth is its abode."

So, for God-realisation one needs deep, one-minded concentration, must shun sense objects and study in depth the *Vedas*.

To sum up, according to the *Kena Upanishad*, "This is the truth of *Brahman* in relation to nature." Whether in the flash of the lightening, or in the wink of the eyes the power that is shown is the power of the *Brahman*."

The *Kena Upanishad* clearly declares "this is the truth of *Brahman* in relation to men, in the motions of the mind, the power that is shown is the power of the *Brahman*."

3. KATHA UPANISHAD

Katha is perhaps third important treatise among the *Upanishads*. It has the most popular invocation, "May he protect us both, the teacher and the taught by revealing knowledge. May he protect us both by vouchsafing the results of knowledge, May we attain vigour together. Let what we study be invigorating. May we not cavil at each other."

Om sa nababatu
Saha nou bhunaktu
Saha beerya karababahoi
Tejashyi nabadhitamastu
Mu bidvisabahoi.

Katha says, "Knowledge is called *Upanishad* by virtue of its association with (deep) significance. "Knowledge splits up, injures or destroys the seeds of wordly existence such as ignorance in the cases of those seekers of emancipation who after becoming detached from the desire for the seen and unseen objects approach (*upa sad*) the knowledge that is called *Upanishad* and that bears the characteristics to be presented to the real seekers of Truth.

The *Katha Upanishad* starts with invocation to the God of death and the saint Nachiketa. "Salutation to *Bhagwan Yama* (Death) son of the Sun and the impartor of knowledge of

Brahman, and salutation to Nachiketa." To attain God-realisation one must have "special attributes."

Vajasrava's son Gautama gave away everything to the Brahmanas. His son was Nachiketa. He was noticing this gifting ceremony. The child asked the father "to whom are you offering me?" The father was unmindful but the son was repeating the question. On this the vexed father replied, "I offer you to Death".

The *Katha Upanishad* is a communication between Yama, the God of Death and Nachiketa. The dialogue is extremely philosophical. The God of Death is also known as *Dharma*.

Katha records "Death told him (Nachiketa) of the *Fire* that is the source of the world, the class and number of bricks, as also the manner of arranging for the fire. And he (Nachiketa), too, repeated verbatim with understanding, all these as they were spoken".

Katha Upanishad is a reply to the human desire for materialistic gains, lusts and temporary happiness. In his chapter on *Materialism* in *Indian Philosophy* Vol. I. Dr. Radhakrishnan, refers to *Katha Upanishad*. He wrote, "that life is suffering and the objects of the world only lures and torments, seemed to be the heritage from the *Upanishads*. Witness the question of Nachiketa to Yama. "Shall we be happy with maidens, horses, wealth, royalty when we see thee O Death" ?

Yama had given Nachiketa three boons because of his devotion to father and good hearted simplicity and God realisation. His heart earnestly wanted to explore the Truth. He had received rare boons from Death: his father's composure, knowledge about *Fire*, and knowledge of the *Self*. The fourth boon was also granted : That was knowledge on *Karma*.

Earlier while asking for the three boons, Nachiketa prayed to Death, "O Death, of the three boons I ask this one as the first, viz. that (my father) Gautama may become freed from anxiety, calm of mind, freed from anger towards me, and he may recognise me and talk to me when freed by you". This fright was because Nachiketa was already dead (his father has

offered him to Death). His father was obviously under that idea and on his return might have taken him to be a mere ghost ! He might have avoided him.

Yama allowed all the three. He promised that at the very sight of the son freed from the jaws of death, his father will forget all anger, will feel happy and will shower all his affection on him.

Secondly, Nachiketa asked *Yama*, "O Death, such as you are, you know that Fire which leads to heaven of that you tell me who am full of faith. The dwellers of heaven get immortality. This I ask for through the second boon".

This is a very important canto of *Katha Upanishad*. Here Fire is symbolic. What was Yama's reply ? He said, "that Fire which is the support of the world, know it to be established in the intellect of the enlightened ones".

Yama accepted this second boon offering a multiformed necklace and assured that "fire will be known by your name indeed". This Fire has three phases ! One must know, "how the sacrificial wood is to be piled up, how the Fire is to be procured and how it is to be lit.

So today it is known to all that "One who getting connection with the three, piles up *Nachiketa Fire* thrice and undertake three kinds of work, crosses over Death. Getting knowledge of that omniscient one who is born of *Brahman* and realising Him, he attains this peace fully."

Then comes the third boon. That is the knowledge about self. "This doubt that arises consequent on the death of a man—some saying 'it exists' and others saying 'it does not exist' I would know this, under your instruction of the boons, this one is the third boon".

The God of Death hesitated. This is the subtle secret of life and he did not like to part with this knowledge. So Death wanted Nachiketa to ask for another boon and requested him not to press for this secret.

This is the greatest of the secrets about which "even Gods entertained doubts". The God of death came with many alternatives. He wanted Nachiketa to ask for "sons, grandsons that will be centenarians. And you yourself live for as many years as you like". And many other alternatives—a ruler of a vast area, vast wealth and what not. Yama offered Nachiketa all cherished things in One's life. He offered even women with chariots and musical instruments such are not surely to be had by mortals. He pleaded with Nachiketa not to insist on the secret of Death. Nachiketa declined all presents describing them as merely "ephemeral." They waste away the vigour of all the senses that a man has. Nachiketa insisted on knowledge beyond death. "Tell us of that thing about which people entertain doubt in the context of the next world and whose knowledge leads to a great result." He was insisting on the "inscrutable" thing.

The God of Death found Nachiketa suitable for real knowledge. So he continued his lesson with the young disciple. He said, "The preferable is different indeed and so indeed is the pleasurable men. Good befalls him who accepts the *preferable* among these two. He who selects the *pleasurable* falls from the true end."

In reality, all great works, even earthly need hard work, diligence, patience and perseverance. No wonder *Yama* asked Nachiketa that *pleasurable* is not the proper way. One has to make clear cut distinction between the two. *Katha* says, "The man of intelligence having considered them separates the two. The intelligent one selects the electable in preference to detectable ; the non-intelligent one selects the detectable for the sake of growth and (the) protection."

So it is an open choice between the life of luxury and life of austerity, between the path of comforts and path of patient hard work. *Katha* clearly says that the "path of wealth leads many a man to grief."

Says the *Katha*, there is great difference between knowledge and ignorance. These are divergent courses. *Yama* advised Nachiketa all those aspirants for knowledge would not be tempted by the multifarious enjoyable things in life. It says, "Living

in the midst of ignorance and considering themselves intelligent and enlightened the senseless people go round and round following crooked courses, just like the blind led by the blind." The man who is dazzled by the lure of wealth never attains inner enlightenment. He is only "befooled by it. "One that constantly thinks that there is only this world and none hereafter, comes under my (God of Death) way again and again."

It is clearly observed in *Katha* that only an enlightened person can lead another to God-realisation. Who can lead you ? Yama tells Nachiketa, "When taught by one who has become identified with It (that is Self) there is no further cogitation with regard to it. For *It* is beyond argumentation, being subtler even than the atomic quantity."

Thus saying the soul of Death blesses Nachiketa and imparts in him the real enlightenment. He says, "The wisdom that you have, O Dearest one, which leads to sound knowledge when imparted by someone else (Other than the Logician) is not to be attained through argumentation. You are, O compassionate one endowed with true resolution. May our questioner be like you O Nachiketa."

Then he told Nachiketa how he gave this enlightenment of a permanent quality by enkindling the *Nachiketa Fire*. Nachiketa attained this highest reward of divine enlightenment by rejecting all temporal earthly desire and patiently undergoing deep meditation. Yama tells Nachiketa after appreciating all qualities of head and heart, "the intelligent man gives up happiness and sorrow developing concentration of mind on the Self and thereby meditating on the old Deity who is inscrutable, lodged inaccessibly, located in the intellect, and seated in the midst of misery.

Nachiketa was a hard nut. He would not leave Yama with the subtle secret of divine knowledge. He insisted that God of Death should explain to him how to make distinction of virtue from vice, difference between cause and effect and difference from past and future.

Yama finally agreed to give the secret of Truth. "I will tell you briefly of that goal which all the *Vedas* with one voice pro-

pound which all the austerities speak of and wishing for which people practise *Brahmacharya* it is this : *OM*."

This is the secret to God-realisation. No *mantra* or no *japam* is full or perfect without prefix of *OM*. In modern days much research has been done on this great mono syllable *OM*. It has indeed electrifying effect in any human mind. Utter it hundred times, you will feel the vibration. There are many interpretations of the word. Some says *Om* consists of *AUM* signifying *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, *Maheshwar*. The *Katha* records, "this letter is, indeed, the Supreme *Brahman*."

This word is the key to God-realisation. The *Upanishad* says, "Anybody who, (while) meditating on this letter, wants any of the two to him comes that" the crux of *Katha Upanishad* lies here. It indicates and guides one to God-realisation by showing the proper path. It says, "this medium (utterance of *Om*) is the best; this medium is the supreme *Brahman*. Meditating on this medium, one becomes adorable in the world of *Brahman*. Then comes the most important utterance of the *Katha Upanishad*.

Na jayatay mriyatay
Ba bipaschinnayang kuttaschinna .
Babhuva Kaschit;
Ajo nityah sasvatoang purano
Na hanyatay hanyamanay shariray.

What does it mean ? This has been repeated in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* where *Sri Krishna* was giving the description of the Human Soul. The body is changed, not the soul.

In the *Katha Upanishad*, the God of Death says, "The intelligent Self is neither born nor does it die. It did not originate from anything, nor did anything originate from *It*. It is birthless, eternal, undecaying and ancient. It is not injured when the body is killed." So it leads to the next canto which clearly says, "no one can kill another."

The next point for consideration would be how to know the Self ? God of Death tells Nachiketa, "The Self that is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great is lodged in the heart

of every creature. A desireless man sees that glory of the Self through the serenity of the organs and thereby becomes free from sorrow."

Desire is dangerous, as it is for an individual it is equally or perhaps more for a nation. The root cause of all social or world problems is desire. When a man has great desire he is under a mirage. He loses his mental equilibrium. It is like being power intoxicated. A greedy man is a danger to society as a greedy nation is a danger to world peace. Here lies the eternal voice of India : The voice of renunciation, for God-realisation and exploration of Eternal Truth. This most significant idea was followed up also in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*.

"A desireless man can have full control over his mind-Self which travel far away ; while sleeping, *It* goes everywhere." He can know the Deity both joyful and joyless.

Just like a desireless man, a Self realised man, who is really wise will never grieve.

Death tells Nachiketa, "This Self cannot be known through much study" nor through the intellect nor through much hearing. It can be known through the Self alone that the aspirant prays to this self of that seeker reveals *Its* true nature." God of Death then tells Nachiketa about the qualifications of an individual who cannot ever get God-realisation. He says, "One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are not under control, whose mind is not concentrated, whose mind is not free from anxiety, cannot attain this Self through knowledge."

Here the emphasis is on mind. One who can keep his mind under control can realise the highest divine secrets.

In the priority of Mode of prayers the *Nachiketa Fire* tops. Other five Fires are Heaven, Cloud, Earth, Man and Woman. They can know the *Brahman*.

How to proceed ?

Katha Upanishad says, "Know the Self as the matter of the chariot, and the body as the charioteer. Know the intellect as the charioteer, and the mind as the bridle."

How to reach the goal ?

Katha Upanishad says

Utthistata jagrata

Prapya Barannibodhata

Kshurasya dhara nishita duratyaya

Durga pathestat kabaya badanti

Arise, awake and learn of approaching the excellent ones. The wise ones describe that path to be as impassable as a razor's edge, which when sharpened is difficult to tread on.

These lines were frequently on the lips of great men like Swami Vivekananda who not only derived their inspiration from the famous canto, the great Swami used the same for inspiring the whole of humankind. In fact "Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached" was the motto of his life, his oraginations (the Ramakrishna Mission) and the capsule substance of the complete works in eight volumes.

4. TAITTIRIYA UPANISHAD

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* starts with an invocation to the *Brahman*, "the nature of consciousness from which this whole universe was born into which it gets dissolved, and by which this is sustained."

It is followed by obeisance to *Varuna*, *Indra*. *Brihaspati*, *Vishnu* and *Vayu*. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* deals with the science of pronunciation. Here teaching is imparted on the alphabet, accent, measure, emphasis, uniformity, juxtaposition. So, it is clear, the science of phonetics was in ancient India much before any other country could think of it. It is indeed interesting to note that even during those earlier days the sages had appreciated that "comprehension of meaning is dependent on proper pronunciation; and the slackness of effort refers to error in pronunciation."

It is here that greatest stress is laid on the importance of the sacred mono syllable *OM*. "*Om* is *Brahman*. *Om* is all this. *Om* is well known as a word of imitation (i.e. concurrence)." This word is prefixed to any *mantra*. "They make them recite to the

Gods with the words OM." They commence singing *Samas* with OM. Uttering the words *Om Som* they recite the *Sastras*. The (priest) Adhvaryu utters the encouraging words with *Om*. One permits the performance of the *Agnihotre* sacrifice with the word *Om*. A Brahman, when about to recite the *Vedas* utters *Om* under the idea *I Shall attain Brahman*. Then the sage confirms, "he does verily attain *Brahman*."

Great stress is laid on moral and ethical values. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says, "Having taught the *Vedas*, the preceptor practises righteousness. Make no mistake about study. Having offered the desirable wealth to the teacher, do not cut off the line of progeny. There should be no inadvertance about truth. There should be no deviation from righteous activity. There should be no error about protecting of yourself. Do not neglect propitious activities. Do not be careless about learning and teaching." In the ancient value judgment, the place of parents, teachers and guest had been assigned a high place. "There should be no error in the duties towards Gods. Let your mother be a goddess unto you. Let your father be a god unto you. Let your teacher be a god unto you."

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* deals with *Karma*, knowledge and liberation. It is in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* that we get the key to the modern *Brahmo Samaj Movement* : *Satyam jnanam anantam Brahma*. "The knower of *Brahman* attains the highest."

The *Upanishad* concludingly observes, *Brahman* is the Truth, Knowledge and Infinite. He who knows that *Brahman* as existing in the intellect, lodged in the Supreme space in the heart, enjoys, as identified with the all knowing *Brahman*, all desirable things simultaneously."

This *Brahman* is the Self.

"Life lasts so long as the vital force resides in this body."

The most important message of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is that "Knowledge actualises a sacrifice and it executes the duties as well."

It says further, "The enlightened man is not afraid of anything after realising that Bliss of *Brahman* failing to reach

which, words turn back along with the mind." *Taittiriya Upanishad*, Juan Mascaro recorded, specially stressing the need of ethical code of conduct :

"I will speak words of Truth and the words of divine law shall be on my lips.

Master and disciple.

May the light of sacred knowledge

Illumine us and may we attain

The glory of wisdom."

For a good conduct what do we need ?

"What is needful

Righteousness, and sacred learning

Truth, and sacred learning and teaching.

Meditation, and sacred learning and teaching.

Self control, and sacred learning and teaching.

Peace, and sacred learning and teaching.

Ritual and sacred learning and teaching

Humanity and sacred learning and teaching."

The emphasis in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is on Truthfulness and on Austerity through real practice of the teachings of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* the enlightened sages and saints attained salvation. They have recorded in clear terms, "I have gone (by practising these teachings and experiments) beyond the Universe and the light of the sun is my light."

Many of the thoughts latter on expressed in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* are clearly reflected in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*.

A brief treatise has also been attempted by Frederick Manchester under the learned guidance of Swami Prabhavananda. In this popular book entitled also *The Upanishad* published from New York, Frederick Manchester records a summary of the divine scripture. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says :

Thou art the refuge of those

Who surrender themselves to Thee

Reveal Thyself to me,

Make me Thine own,

I take my refuge in Thee.

These ideas were the guiding light behind all the major works of the world poet Rabindranath Tagore.

“Thou art the Lord immortal, Self
luminous, and of Golden effulgence
Within the lotus of every heart,
Within the heart Thou revealed to
those that seek thee.”

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* too emphasises, on the search of the Self. The two—*Self* and *Brahman*—finally get identified. They are mingled into One.

“I am that Self ! I am life immortal. I overcome the world. I who am endowed with golden effulgence. Those who know me achieve Reality.”

To the ordinary lay man, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* says, “whatever you give to others, give in abundance, with joy, humility and compassion.”

The *Upanishad* directs, “If at any time there is any doubt with regard to right conduct, follow the practice of great souls, who are guideless, of good judgement and devoted to Truth.”

“From food are born all creatures which live upon food and after death return to food. Food is chief of all things. It is therefore said to be medicine for all diseases, of the body. Those who worship food as *Brahman* gain all material objects.”

(Manchester, Frederick : *The Upanishad*, Page 35)

5. MUNDAKA UPANISHAD

According to *Mundaka Upanishad*, knowledge is of two varieties the higher and the lower. It is observed by the Saint Angiras, “The lower is the knowledge of the *Vedas* (the *Rig*, the *Sama*, the *Yajur* and the *Atharva*) and also of phonetics, ceremonials, grammar, etymology, metre and astronomy.” The Saint explains that “The higher knowledge is that by which one knows the changeless reality. By this is fully revealed to the wise that which transcends the senses, which is uncaused, which is verily indefinable, which has neither eyes nor ears, neither hands nor feet, which is all pervading, subtler than the subtlest the everlasting source of all.”

The all knowing *Brahman* exists “cosmic intelligence, name and the material cause of all created beings and things.”

This *Brahman*—who is all, who is action, who is knowledge, who is goodness supreme—dwells in every human heart. He is the only power who can untie the knot of ignorance.

A very important point here to ponder over is the catholicity of the views on the all-pervading Almighty. There is no discrimination between the good or bad, the holy and the unholy, the pious and the sinner. He loves all. He is “hidden in the lotus of the heart” of one and all.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* says, “Self luminous is *Brahman* ever present in the heart of all. He is the refuge of all. He is the Supreme goal. In him exists all that moves and breathes. In him exists all that is. He is both that which is gross and that which is subtle. Adorable is He. Beyond the ken of the senses is He. Supreme is He. Attain thou Him.”

The *Mundaka Upanishad* also agrees like the *Taittiriya Upanishad* that *Brahman* is the ultimate goal and that He can be attained through uttering of the mono syllable *Om*. It says, “*Om* is the bow, the arrow is the individual being, and *Brahman* is the target.”

The *Mundaka Upanishad* directs all seekers of Truth to meditate on the Almighty as *Om*. By that, one can easily cross “the sea of darkness.”

When a person gets the divine light, when he gets real knowledge he no longer has any separate identity. It says, “As the rivers flow into the sea and in so doing lose name and form, even so the wise man, freed from name and form, attains the Supreme Being, the Self luminous, the *Infinite*.”

What is the state of mind of one who has had a vision of the divinity, one who has felt such an identity with the Infinite ?

The *Mundaka Upanishad* says “Having known the *Self*, the sages are filled with joy. Blessed are they, tranquil of mind, free from passion. Realising everywhere the all pervading *Brahman*,

deeply absorbed in contemplation of his being, they enter into him, the self of all."

When such a stage comes, the person finds no difference between good or bad. Nobody seems to him to be a sinner. He loves everything on earth. "When the seer beholds the Effulgent one both good and evil, and freed from impurities, he unites himself with Him."

At this stage everything seems to be sweet and beautiful. That is because, "The Lord is the one life shining forth from every creature. Seeing Him present in all, the wise man is humble, puts not himself forward. His delight is in the Self, his joy is in the Self, he serves the Lord in all. Such as he, indeed are the true knowers of *Brahman*."

One of the main keynotes to all seekers of light is, as repeatedly directed in all the *Upanishads*, so also by the *Mundaka* which categorically observes, "Truth alone succeeds, not untruth. By truthfully the path of felicity is opened up, the path which is taken by the sages, freed from cravings and which leads them to truths eternal abode."

As a sage has described this Infinite cannot be seen by eyes. "The eyes do not see him, Speech cannot utter him (describe him), the senses cannot reach him. He is to be attained neither by austerity nor by sacrificial rites. When through discrimination the heart has become pure then in meditation the impersonal Self is revealed."

This is a great hint to the path of God-realisation by one who has realised Truth.

As described in the *Katha Upanishad* the *Mundaka Upanishad* too observes, "Him the sun does not illumine, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor the lightning—nor verily, fires kindled, upon the earth. He is the one light that gives light to all. He shining, everything shines."

According to the interpretation of Juan Mascaro, "As from fire aflame thousands of sparks come forth, even so from the Creator an infinity of beings have life and to him return again."

The *Mundaka Upanishad* clearly observes, "that everything on

earth, life and mind and the senses originate from the supreme divine power."

Bookish knowledge never leads anyone to God-realisation. Neither do the ritualistic activities. Those who read many scriptures foolishly think themselves wise and learned and "aimlessly go hither and thither, like blind led by the blind."

The holy scripture clearly mentions, "Imagining religious ritual and gifts of charity as the final goal, the unwise see not the path Supreme. Indeed they have in high heaven the reward of their pious actions ; but thence they fall and come to earth or even down to lower regions."

Mundaka prescribes meditation for tranquility and real knowledge. Self enlightenment is possible only through Self searching not by reading aimlessly a number of religious treatises. They, are simply meaningless. It says, "those who in purity and faith lie in the solitude of the forest, who have wisdom and peace and long not for earthly possessions those in radiant purity pass through the gates of the sun to the dwelling place supreme where the Spirit is in Eternity."

Thus also spoke great enlightened souls and Godmen of present generation like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ramana Maharsi, Sri Aurbindo and many others. Here the essence of realisation and light is invariably attained only through the path of renunciation. This idea has been lucidly, elucidated in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*.

The lover of God, the seeker of Truth must attain renunciation. This is possible, the *Mundaka Upanishad* says, by the guidance of a proper preceptor. It says, "What is above creation cannot be attained by action. In his longing for divine wisdom, let him go with reverence to a Teacher in whom live the sacred words and whose soul has peace in *Brahman*."

To a pupil who comes with mind and senses in peace the teacher gives the vision of *Brahman*, of the Spirit of Truth and Eternity.

The *Upanishad* stresses on the importance of a spiritual guide. In no field of specialisation can anybody attain perfection and success without a proper guide. It is all the more

necessary in the realm of spirituality where the path is more strenuous and difficult. In the selection of a spiritual pathfinder one has to find an enlightened soul. Merely a "learned" scholar with a number of degrees may not necessarily guide such a disciple. That disciple is a lucky one who by Grace—*Kripa*—of God gets the proper preceptor. This concept of a spiritual guide is as ancient as the manifestation of the *Vedas*. One must remember, in ancient times, in the absence of any print medium, it was not so easy a job for a preceptor to take charge of a disciple. In fact, to be precise, the preceptor known as the *Acharya* or the *Guru* had to undergo greater hardship than the disciple because every time he had to repeat the same philosophical and religious experiments and experiences. But they were great men, men without any desire and wanted to spread the light of knowledge. The born preceptors, in fact, used to search such disciples to whom they could "pass on" the spiritual power and divine knowledge and light. It was the same in case of Sri Ramakrishna who got all his spiritual power transmitted to his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda.

Describing God Almighty, the sage author of the *Mundaka Upanishad* writes, "The head of his body is fire, and his eyes the Sun and the Moon; his ears, the regions of Heaven, and the sacred *Vedas* his word. His breath is the wind that blows and this whole universe is his heart. This earth is his footstool. He is the spirit that is in all things. From him comes the Sun and the source of all fire is the Sun."

How to get or gain the power? Power that is force, that puts one into action. That is done or gained through *tapas*, meditation or inner transcendental concentration. *The Mundaka Upanishad* says, "The spirit is truth in all; action, and the power of *Tapas*, and *Brahman* the creator, and immortality. He who knows him dwelling in the secret place of the heart cuts asunder the bonds of ignorance even in this human life."

And strangely enough although it is so illuminating and bright, eyes cannot see him. "Radiant is his light, yet invisible in the secret place of the heart, the Spirit is the supreme abode wherein dwells all that moves and breaths and sees." It

is very much like the deer which runs after the fragrance of the musk not knowing that he himself is having it with him !

6. MANDUKYA UPANISHAD

The greatest stress in the *Mandukya Upanishad* is on the mono syllable *Om*. In fact it goes one step further. It feels "this eternal word is all—what was, what is and what shall be, and what beyond is in eternity. All is *Om*." Even many modern scholars are trying to give latest scientific explanation of the supreme sound power of this mono syllable. There are sound power of this mono syllable. There are theories that the vibration created by the utterance of the word awakens the whole body and mind. It generates terrific spiritual consciousness and each letter of the word is deeply meaningful. Even if an agnostic who refuses the existence of God utters this word for few hundred times he will get freshness of mind and new vigour in life.

Om actually consists of three letter *Aum*. Each sound has a deep significance. The utterance of the letter *A* signifies "*the first state of waking consciousness, common to all men. It is found in the words Apjti, attaining and Adimatvam, being first. Who knows this attains in truth all his desires, and in all things becomes first.*"

The *Upanishad* further clarifies the second sound, that is *U* signifies "*the sacred states of dreaming consciousness. It is found in the words Utkarsha, Uprising, and Ubhayatvam. Who knows this raises the tradition of knowledge and attain equilibrium. In his family is never born any one who knows not Brahman.*"

Finally comes the last of three letters *M*. It stands for "*the third state of sleeping consciousness. It is found in the words, Miti, Measure, and in the root Mi to end, that gives Apiti final and who knows these measures all with his mind and attain the final end.*"

So *Om* stands for Supreme consciousness. This excellent interpretation has been further elucidated by Juan Mascaro in the book *The Upanishad* (pages 65-82).

The *Mandukya Upanishad* directs all to make best use of this human life by utilising each of ears, eyes, mind devoted to the only goal of human life, that is God-realisation. "With our ears may we hear what is good. With our eyes may we behold the righteousness. Tranquil in body may we who worship Thee find rest."

That God-realisation has been made easy as already explained, by uttering the mono syllable *Om* which is "*imperishable Brahman*" That pervades the Universe. It reiterates "whatsoever existed, whatsoever exists hereafter as *Om*. And whatsoever transcends past, present and future, that also is *Om*."

It stresses equal importance to the discovery or knowledge of the Self, that is *Brahman*. This self is one with *Brahman*. It has mainly three aspects. "The first aspect of Self is the Universal person, the collective symbol of created beings, in his physical nature *Vaiswarana*. *Vaiswarana* is to awake, and is conscious only of eternal objects. He has seven members. The heavens are his head, the sun his eyes, air his breath, fire his heart, water his belly, earth his feet and space his body."

This great Self or the *Brahman* knows everything through nineteen instruments which include five organs of sense, five organs of action, five functions of the breath, together with mind, intellect heart and ego. "He is the enjoyer of the pleasure of sense."

The second aspect of this Self is *Taijasa* which is "the universal person in his mental nature." *Taijasa* has seven members and nineteen instruments of knowledge. Here dream through the mind is the main faculty.

7. CHANDOGYA UPANISHAD

One of the most important of the *Upanishads* it raises some basic curiosities of a searching mind. "Wherefrom do all these worlds come? It gives the reply too. "They come from space. All beings arise from space, and unto space, they return: Space is indeed their beginning, and space is their final end."

Prajapati is the creator of the Universe. It is in this beautiful *Upanishad* that we get the *Gayatri Mantra*. "The most sacred

verse of the *Vedas*.” It is observed that when Prajapati, the creator was in deep meditation out of his spiritual realisation three words, rather sounds, arose : *Bhur*, *Bhuvas*, *Svar* meaning thereby the earth, air and the sky. From this was originated the mono syllable *Om*. “Even as all leaves come from a stem, all words come from the sound *Om*. *Om* is the whole universe.”

In this great *Gayatri Mantra* is hidden the entire force that enlivens a *Brahmacharin* to get his inner self awakened. All Brahmins had to practise it after their sacred thread ceremony. This includes the invocation to the power of the Sun God. The *Gayatri Mantra* itself is sufficient to God-realisation. There had been cases where sages, even not long ago, concentrated only on *Gayatri Mantra* and had inner enlightenment. The *Chandogya Upanishad* itself says, “Great is the *Gayatri*, the most sacred verse of the *Vedas* ; but how much greater is the Infinity of *Brahman* : A quarter of his being is this whole vast Universe : the other three quarters are his heaven of Immortality.”

The *Chandogya Upanishad* assigns duties which are of three varieties. The greatest stress is laid on studies, sacrifice, alms giving (i.e. kindness and compassion) followed by austerity and finally the students’ constant company with his preceptor. All the three are necessarily needed for the knowledge of the *Brahman*.

A man’s heart is illumined with divine light ; the same one that shines in heavens and on earth is very much present in every human heart. This *Upanishad* also reiterates the common view of other *Upanishad* that “this universe come forth from *Brahman*.

Only the purified soul can ever have the ecstasy of joy of realising the *Brahman*. With his illumined consciousness he must be ever truthful. He must be unattached. He must be free from any desire.

The Self is “smaller than a grain of rice.” It is “smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than canary seed, yester smaller even than the kernel of a canary seed. Yet again is that Self, within the lotus of my heart,

greater than the earth, greater than the heavens, yea greater than all the worlds."

Here the ancient sage Sandilya says:

"Thou art imperishable.

Thou art the source of life."

It is also observed in the *Upanishad* "Life is *Brahman*." "The Infinite is the source of joy. There is no joy in the finite. Only in the *Infinite* is there joy."

The *Chandogya Upanishad* says, "This body is mortal, always gripped by death, but within it dwells, the immortal Self. This Self when associated in our consciousness with the body is subject to pleasure and pain, and so long as this association continues, freedom from pleasure and pain can no man find. But as this association ceases, there cease also the pleasure and the pain."

This idea was later followed up in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* where it was prominently mentioned by *Sri Krishna*. The *Upanishad* says further, "Rising above physical consciousness, knowing the Self to be distinct from the senses and the mind—knowing it in its true light—one rejoices and is free." Where human eyes look at the Space it is the Spirit of man that sees: the eye is only the organ of sight.

It is only through divine grace that one can get divine light. Only by that grace one can go to the imperishable treasure to the spirit of light to the spirit of earth, to the spirit of the air and to the spirit of the heavens.

"A man is a living sacrifice", it says.

"There is a Spirit that is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. He contains all works and desires and all perfumes and tastes. He enfolds the whole universe, and in silence is loving to all."

In the *Chandogya Upanishad* we are told that the creation is full of joy. It says where there is creation, there is joy. It categorically records "Where there is joy there is creation." So one has to know the nature of joy. How to get this great cheer of life?

It says further "where there is the Infinite there is joy, there is no joy in the finite. Only in the Infinite there is joy." So one has to go to the main source and know the nature of the *Infinite*. It shows the path to *Infinite* too.

The *Chandogya Upanishad* says, "Where nothing is seen, or heard, or known there is the *Infinite*. Where something else is seen, or heard or known there is the finite. The *Infinite* is immortal : but the finite is mortal."

Where can one get this *Infinite* ? It is obtained or realised through one's own greatness. That is possible only through renunciation and not through wealth. The Infinite is the Universe. This is *Atman*. The *Atman* is *Infinite*.

"He who sees knows and understands this, who finds in *Atman*. The Spirit, his love and pleasure and his union and his joy, becomes a Master of himself. His freedom then is infinite."

8. BRIHAD ARANYAKA UPANISHAD

The most famous hymn that is uttered in almost every house even today:

Asotoma sadgamaya

Tamasoma jyotirgamaya

Mrityur ma apyritang gamaya

Abhirabi mayadhi. It means:

From delusion lead me to Truth

From darkness lead me to Light

From death lead me to immortality

occurs in the important *Upanishad* known as the *Brihad Aranyaka*. This forms part of daily prayer in many temples, schools and houses every day.

Unlike some other *Upanishads* where it has been stressed that the Universe is the Infinite, the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* maintains that "this universe is a trinity and this is made of name, form and action."

"Word" is most important. That is because it is the source of all names, even as *Brahman* is behind the Word."

This *Upanishad* observes, "the source of all forms is the eye, for it is by the eye that all forms are seen. The eye is behind all forms, even as *Brahman* is behind the eye."

“The source of all actions is the body, for it is by the body that all actions are done. The body is behind all actions, even as *Brahman* is behind the body.”

So the word, the eye and the body, the three form the *Atman*, the spirit of life and “*Atman* although one, is of these three.” According to the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*, “The immortal is veiled by the real.

The spirit of life is the immortal. Name and form are the real and by them the Spirit is veiled.”

It is again the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* that the seer says after enlightenment, *Ahang Brahmasmi*—I am the *Brahman*. That is the great *Maha vakya*, the great word. It is also in the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* that the seer says, *Ayam Atma Brahma* This Self is *Brahman*.

About the awakening of the Self, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to tell a parable that was popularised by his illustrious disciple Swami Vivekananda. The Great Saint's *Vedanta* teacher and preceptor Tota Puri used to tell him the story. “A lioness in search of prey came upon a flock of sheep, and as she jumped at one of them, she gave birth to a cub and died on the spot. The young lion was brought up in the flock, ate grass and bleated like a sheep and it never knew that it was a lion. One day a lion came across the flock and was astonished to see in it a huge lion eating grass and bleating like a sheep. At his sight the flock fled and the lion-sheep with them. But the lion watched his opportunity and one day found the lion sheep asleep. He woke him up and said, ‘you are a lion.’ The other said, no, and began to bleat like a sheep. But the stranger lion took him to a lake and asked him to look in the water at his own image and see if it did not resemble him, the stranger lion. He looked and acknowledged that it did. Then the stranger lion began to roar and asked him to do the same. The lion sheep tried his voice and was soon roaring as grandly as the other. And he was a sheep no longer.”

(Swami Vivekananda : *Complete Works, Vol 1, pp 324-425*)

“The Self is the **dearest** of all things : and only through the Self is anything else dear. The Self is origin of all finite happiness, but it is itself pure bliss, transcending definition remains unaffected by deeds, good, or bad. It is beyond feeling and it is beyond knowledge, but it is not beyond the meditation of the sage.”

The final goal of life should be to explore the Self.

Like all other *Upanishads*, the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad* too says that the *Brahman* is all pervading.

“Filled with the *Brahman* are the things we see.

Filled with the *Brahman* are the things we see not.

From out of *Brahman* floweth all that is :

From *Brahman* all—yet is he still the same.”

The Names and Forms grew up from the mere seed. This whole world “existed first as seed.” As fire in the wood so dwells the Self, the Lord of the Universe “in all forms, even to the tips of the fingers.” The Lord is hidden behind the Names and Forms. “When one speaks, one knows him as speech ; when one sees, one knows him as eye, when one hears, one knows him as ear, when one thinks one knows him as mind. All these are but names related to his acts ; and he who worships the Self as one or another of them does not know him, for of them does not know him, for of them he is neither one nor another. Wherefore let a man worship him as the Self and as the Self alone.”

“By knowing this Self, one knows the Lord, the Universal Father. By knowing the Self he knows all. He who knows the Self is honoured of all men and attains to blessedness.”

The whole Universe, before it was created, existed only as *Brahman*. I am *Brahman*, thus did *Brahman* know himself. When the seer Yajnavalkya, the great ancient sage wanted to have everything, he wished to distribute his wealth between Maitreyi and Katyani. He wanted to retire and devote the rest of his life to meditation. Maitreyi was equally learned, one of the most learned women of ancient India. She asked the husband what she would do with that wealth which does not help

to get God-realisation ? "What should I do with possession that cannot give me life eternal ? Give me instead your knowledge, O my Lord."

The sage gave her the guideline to God-realisation. He said, "In Truth it is not for the love of a husband that a husband is dear; but for the love of the soul in the husband that husband is dear.

It is not for the love of a wife that a wife is dear; but for the love of the soul in the wife that wife is dear. It is not for the Love of children that children are dear but for the love of Soul in the children that children are dear."

In all matters similarly even in the matter of religion and God it is not for that particular matter but for the Soul of that matter that they are dear. That is mainly because religion, power, heavens, beings, gods and all—everything on earth—rest on the Soul.

The Sage finally concluded—and that is the most important theme of the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*,—"As long as there is duality, one sees the other, one hears the other, one smells the other, one speaks to the other, one thinks of the other, one knows the other but when for the illumined soul the all is dissolved in the Self, who is then to be spoken by whom, who is there to be thought of by whom, who is there to be heard by whom, who is there to be known by whom ? By intelligence which reveals all—by what shall it be revealed ? By whom shall the knower be known. The Self is described as *not this, not that*. It is incomprehensible, for it cannot be comprehended; undecaying for it never decays, unattached, for it never attaches itself; unbound, for it is never bound. By whom shall the knower be known ?" This is the Truth of Immortality.

The earth is ever beautiful and full of joy and honey. Everything is honey—the earth, the water, the fire, the air, the sun, the space, the moon, the lightening, the thunder, the ether, the law, the Truth, the race of men, and finally the Self.

"The self is the lord of all beings, the king of all beings. There is nothing that is not surrounded by him. He can assume

any form through his *Maya* in tens, in thousands and numberless.

“This *Brahman* is without cause, without effect, without inside, or outside. This *Brahman* is the *Self*.”

This *Self* is omniscient Lord. Swami Vivekananda explains it in a popular lucid manner. In the *Complete Works* of Vivekananda Vol VI, p 21 we are told :

“As a man having a book in his hands reads one page and turns it over, goes to the next page, reads that, turns it over, and so on yet it is the book that is being turned over, the pages that are revolving and not he—he is where he is always—even so with regard to soul. The whole of nature is that book which the soul is reading. Each life, as it were, is one page of that book; and that read, it is turned over, and so on, until the whole of the book is finished, and the soul becomes perfect, having got all the experiences of nature. Yet at the same time it never mould nor came, nor went; it was only gathering experiences. But it appears to us that we are moving. The earth is moving, yet we think that the sun is moving instead of the earth which we know to be a mistake, delusion of the senses. So is also this delusion that we are born and that we die, that we come or that we go. We neither come nor go; nor have we been born. For where is the soul to go ? There is no place for it to go. Where is it not already?”

What is necessary is meditation. In its highest form, the *Upanishads* say “It is concentration upon the truth *Aham Brahmasmi*. I am the *Brahman*. As aid to meditation various symbols of *Brahman* are accepted of which the most important is the mystic syllable *Om*.”

9. AITAREYA UPANISHAD

Like other *Upanishads*, *Aitareya Upanishad* also reiterates views and realisations of the other sages and seers, that, “*Brahman* source, sustenance and end of the Universe, partakes of every phase of existence. He wakes, with the waking man, dreams with the dreamer, and sleeps the deep sleep of the dreamless sleeper but he transcends these three states to become himself. His true nature is pure consciousness.”

Here the prayer is to inculcate the habit of having consistence of speech with thinking. Here the prayer is Speech with thinking. Here the prayer is to get light so that darkness of ignorance is removed. "Remove the veil of ignorance from before me (so) that I may behold by light," says the seer.

In this famous invocation the sage prays for blessings of the *Brahman*. He begs to get "the Truth of the (holy) scriptures to be revealed. He wants their constant company. He wants to know the Truth through these immortal sayings of the ancient sages and seers through the sacred scriptures. "May I seek day and night to realise what I learn from the sages."

It is not easy to be virtuous. It is not easy to be truthful. It needs great strength of mind. So the seer prays, in the *Aitareya Upanishad*, "May I speak the Truth (of the Universe). May it protect me. May it protect my teacher."

Here we must recall, throughout the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the teacher *Acharya*, the pathfinder plays a unique role. He commands great reverence of the disciple.

According to the *Aitareya Upanishad*, "Before creation all that existed was the Self, the Self alone. Nothing else was there. Then the Self thought : let me send forth the worlds."

What were these worlds ? They were "*Amobhas*, the highest world above the sky and upheld by it, *Marichi*, the Sky ; *Mara*, the Mortal World, the Earth ; and *Apa*, the World Beneath the Earth."

This is supposed to be the history creation of the world according to the *Aitareya Upanishad*.

This *Upanishad* gives a clue to bliss—*Ananda*. It is recorded, "The sages declare that the door of bliss, the highest centre of spiritual consciousness, technically known as *Sahasrara*, the thousand-petalled lotus is situated in the centre of the brain. When the yogi's mind (deeply) absorbed in meditation, reaches this centre, he realises his unity with *Brahman*."

Waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep are the three stages, rather states of the Soul.

The *Aitareya Upanishad* itself raised the question what is the Self? Whom are we worshipping constantly? What is the goal of all our activities? What is nature? Is he the Self by which we seek from, hear sound, smell odor, speak words, taste the sweet or the bitter? Is this Self the heart and the mind by which we perceive, command discriminate, know, think, remember, will, feel, desire, breathe, love and perform other like acts?

The seer himself replies. He finally achieved immortality. That was *Vanadeva*, the Sage—"Nay, these, are but adjuncts of the Self, who is pure consciousness is *Brahman*. He is God, all gods; the five elements (*khityaptejmarutbyom*—*Khiti, Apa, Teja, Marut, Byoma*)-Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Ether; all beings, great or small, born of eggs, born from the womb, born from heat, born from soil." In brief, the *Brahman* pervades the entire creation.

10. PRASNA UPANISHAD

The *Prasna Upanishad* stressed on practising "austerity, continence, faith for a year" after which the real questions would reveal themselves. The Sage here is Saint Pippalada.

The Disciples asked Pippalada, "*Acharya*, how did the creatures come into being? The *Acharya* replied, "The Lord of Beings meditated and produced *Prana*, the primal energy and *Rayi*, the giver of form, desiring that they, male and female, should in manifold ways produce creatures for him."

What is *Prana*? *Prana* which is primal energy is the Sun and *Rayi*, the form giving substance, is the Moon.

The sage convincingly said, "Be it known that all this universe, that which is gross and that which is subtle, is one with *Rayi*. Therefore is *Rayi* omnipresent."

The Universe is one with the *Prana*. "The rising sun pervades the east, and fills with energy all beings that there inhabit; and likewise when his rays fall on the south, the west, the north, the Zenith, the nadir and the intermediate regions, to all beings that there inhabit he gives life."

This *Prana* is the real soul of the Universe.

The *Prasna Upanishad*, too reiterate the importance of the mono syllable *Om* as it has been repeatedly stressed in other *Upanishads*. It says, "the syllable *Om* when it is not fully understood, does not lead beyond mortality. When it is fully understood and meditation is therefore rightly directed, a man is freed from fear, whether he be awake, dreaming, or sleeping the dreamless sleep, and attain *Brahman*. The *Prasna Upanishad* says, "*Om* is *Brahman*—both the conditioned and the unconditioned, the personal and the impersonal. By meditating upon it the wise man may attain either the one or the other."

The devoted will have to know the significance and real meaning of *Om*. "If he meditates upon *Om* with but little knowledge of its meaning, but nevertheless is enlightened thereby, upon his death he will be immediately born again on this earth and during his new life he will be devoted to austerity, continence, and faith, and will attain to spiritual greatness."

It reiterates "if again he meditates upon *Om* with a greater knowledge of its meaning, upon his death he will ascend to the lunar heaven, and after he has partaken of its pleasures will return again to earth."

But that is not the ultimate goal of spiritual practice. One must get enlightenment and must not be reborn. He must avoid the cycle of rebirth. How to get it? The *Prasna Upanishad* says, "if he meditates upon *Om* in the full consciousness that it is one with God, upon his death he will be united with light that is in the Sun, he will be freed from evil, even as a snake is freed from its slough, and he will ascend to God's dwelling place. There he will realise *Brahman* who evermore abides in the heart of all beings—*Brahman*, the Supreme."

The day and night are the Lord of Creation. "Day is life (deriving its energy from the Sun) and night is matter (deriving its energy from the moon)."

The dark fortnight is matter. The bright fortnight is life. It is immaterial whether one conducts one's ritual in the dark or bright fortnight. "Food is in truth, the Lord of creation," it also records. The *Prasna Upanishad* says, "From food seed is produced and from this beings are born." The Sun gives light.

Life is the fire that burns deriving its energy from this sun. Life is also the wind and rain and the thunder in the sky. Life is matter and is earth. "What is and what is not and what beyond is Eternity."

The easiest way to God-realisation is meditation on the mono syllable *Om*, as already narrated. It repeats, the word *Om* "is the transcendent and the immanent *Brahman*, the Spirit, Supreme. With the help of this sacred word the wise attains the one or the other." But it has to be practised correctly.

The syllable *Om* or *AUM* has three sounds. He who rests on the first his meditation is illumined thereby and after death returns speedily to this world of men led by the harmonies of the *Rig Veda*. Remaining here is steadiness, purity, and truth he attains greatness.

"And if he rests his mind in meditation on the first two sounds, he is led by the harmonies of the *Yajur Veda* to the regions of the moon. After enjoying their heavenly joys, he returns to the earth again.

"But if, with the three sounds of the eternal *Om*, he places his mind in meditation upon the Supreme Spirit, he comes to the regions of light of the Sun. There he becomes free from all evil, even as a snake sheds its old skin, and with the harmonies of the *Sama Veda* he goes to the heaven of *Brahman* where from can behold the Spirit that dwells in the city of the human body and which is above highest life."

As when rivers flowing towards the ocean find there, final peace, their name and form disappear, similarly a saintly individual mind and spirit mingle finally into the *Brahman*, where he gets real bliss.

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(Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan)

Inner Meaning of Srimad Bhagavad Gita

Among the holy scriptures of India, the most sacred and the most popular is the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* or in short the *Gita*. The easiest interpretation or explanation of the *Gita* was given by Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who said “utter the word ten times. There you will find its explanation.” If you say *Gita* even twice it sounds like *Tagi*. It means renunciation. Strangely enough there has been no simpler explanation, interpretation or description of the *Gita* than this one. Renunciation is the quintessence of Indian philosophy. It, in a capsule form, carries the entire substance of *Gita* in particular and Indian Philosophy in general.

To quote an authority, “Embedded in one book of the great Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, occurs the *Bhagavad Gita*, or Song of God, the most popular work in all the religious literature of India.”

The great epic was written or compiled most probably in the fifth century B. C. There is no definite proof. It is said very few persons could really realise the inner meaning of the great epic. To Maharshi Vyasa goes the credit of writing this monumental work. But according to traditional heresay,

even Vyasa himself could not realise properly what it contained. Shri Krishna, it is said, observed that only He and Sukh (Maharshi Vyasa's pious son) understood the inner meaning of the *Gita*. Vyasa might have understood or not. *Ahang betti, Suko betti, Vyasa betti naw betti baa.*

In the Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna (Page 194), we are told by Sri Ramakrishna, "The essence of the Gita is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then Tagi, which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gita is, 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for realisation of God.'"

The *Bhagavad Gita* gives complete self-confidence in oneself. It is a long dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. When Arjuna refuses to fight his own relations and feels shy to confront them on the battlefield, Sri Krishna tells him mainly two things :—

First, the dishonest, the wrong doers, the anti social elements must be crushed. That is the first step to have a proper social order. He said catagorically that the Godmen appear on the earth in the form of human beings to crush the unjust elements and instal justice.

*Yadā yadā hi dharmasya
glānirbhavati Bharata
Abhyuththanam adharmasya
tadatmanam srijamyaham
Paritranaya sadhunam
binashya cha duskritam
Dharma sthapanarthaya cha
Sambhabami yugay yugay*

Whenever goodness is eclipsed by evil,
Whenever the evil doers become strong,

I appear on the scene.

I come back and make my appearance
age after age

To save the holy ones and
crush the evil doers and

Finally instal the rule of righteousness.

To Arjuna, the Lord makes it clear that he is ruling the universe. Nothing can happen without His desire. He made it clear that Arjuna was only to play the role of a general. The rest would be done by him. All this he undertook to teach the wrong doers, the *Kauravas* a lesson. They were unnecessarily harassing the innocent *Pandavas*. He had no other alternative than taking the field himself to save the just side.

When Arjuna was hesitating to take up arms against his own relations, and many of whom were not only dear ones but also, elder and much more experienced in life and learning, Sri Krishna explained to him in detail how this misplaced knowledge harm the social order and the world. They must be dealt with by an iron hand. It is here that Sri Krishna gives Arjuna a long lecture not only on philosophy but also in the art of proper rule of justice and ideal administration.

Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna; it is not only the wrong doer who is at fault but also those who support or yield to a wrong deed, that is whoever is a party to this wrong doing is also to be punished.

And mind you who were on the other side ? Stalwarts like Bishma, Drona, Karna and the hundred brothers of Duryodhana. Arjuna was not afraid but was embarrassed to wage a war against these great warriors.

Sri Krishna gave him extra courage. No. They might be strong. They might be great. But in reality they were a pack of cowardly people, merely because they were supporting the evil doers, the dishonest and the corrupt. So, in the name of righteousness, they had to be fought vigorously, Sri Krishna made it clear that he must fight out these "enemies" and must get back his kingdom in the name of justice. And he finally invigorated in him a tremendous force by assuring that whatever was to be done would be done by himself. Let Arjuna be only be a *nimitya*—*Nimitta matrang bhava Sabyasachin*.

He insisted on Arjuna to shun *Klaibya*, a stage of non-action due to utter callousness and weakness of the heart. In

the name of justice, in the saving of proper rule of law and in the name of humanity and for the sake of saving human dignity he (Arjuna) must act. Let him take the arms. The rest would be done.

*Klaibyang masma gama partha
Naitad tay rec upapadyatay*

*Kshudrang hridaya dourbalyang
Tyakita utthistha Paranthapa.*

This is a great sloka, oft quoted, instilling greater inspiration in the mind, not only of Arjuna, but to all those who fight for justice, human dignity and the cause of righteousness.

The second most important assurance given by Sri Krishna was to all his admirers. As an incarnation of God—*Krishnastu Bhagawan Swayang*, only Sri Krishna is God incarnate—he clearly took charge of all those who surrendered themselves to him, who believed in his protecting care and who had the fullest confidence in God.

This too has been a great feature of the epic. In his famous sloka—

*Ananyischintayang to mang
yo jana parjupasatay
Teshang nitye vijuk tosmi
yogakshema vahamyahang.*

Whoever a devotee, surrenders himself fully to God, God takes his change. This true of all religious faiths.

Sri Krishna says,
Give me your whole heart,
Love and adore me,
Worship me always,
Bow to me only
And you shall find me :
This is my promise
Who love you so dearly.

Lay down all your duties
 In me, (is) your refuge,
 Fear no longer
 For I will save you
 From sin and from bondage.

Nowhere in the holy scriptures you would find such an assurance. This is one of the best pieces of the *Gita*. To many, this is the quintessence of the holy scripture. There are interesting anecdotes centering round this all important *sloka*. *Jayadeva*, a great Vaishnava Saint of the eleventh century and composer of the famous *Gita Govind*, once was leading a very impoverished life as was the practice of the learned. He refused royal patronage and wanted to test the Lord's assurance. For days together, except boiled tamarind water he had no solid food. His equally pious wife was *Padmavati*. She gave the learned scholar full company in her devotion, and had, like the husband ; full confidence in Sri Krishna.

One day a young boy came running with baskets of daily groceries. He complained to Padma that the Saint had hit him mercilessly. He showed him his back. It was still bleeding. There was the sign of a sharp whip. Padma could not believe her eyes. This man never lost his cool. He was as calm as a cucumber. How could he lose his temper ?

On his return from the bathing *ghat*, she asked quite agitatingly why the saint was rude to the "dark boy with lotus like eyes."

Jayadeva was stunned. He could realise his blunder. Forced by the agony of hunger he had cut the ling *bahamyahang* (I carry his charge). He could understand who had appeared before the luckier devotee Padma. He wrote back with his blood three times *bahamyachang*, *bahamyahang*, *bahamyahang*.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say that *Bhakti*, *Bhagavat* and *Bhagavan*, the three are one and one in three. The *Bhagavad Gita* is considered as sacred as God Himself. At the same time, the place of a devotee too is also

equally unique. A really devoted soul is always in tune with divinity. As such he is also at par with God. God is the highest conception of a human mind. Equally high are those human mind. Equally high are those who are devoted to Him. The holy scripture is equally to be venerated.

So each individual must try to know his real identity. If one has to have God-realisation, if one is earnest to "see" God, he must first explore his own identity. He must have full knowledge of himself. One must know himself.

This may lead to many interpretations. As the ancient sages and seers repeatedly observed, "God lives in one's own heart." It is a futile attempt to search him in the forests or jungles, temples or pilgrimages. So too one must know himself first. That is the first step to God-realisation.

SOCIAL VALUES

Religious teachings apart, the *Gita* gives direction to culture a proper social value judgment. One must give the highest regard to his fellow being. The *Gita*, in its detailed modern interpretation, is a *magna charta* for human Rights. As early as 2500 years ago, it solemnly declared :

"All mankind is born for perfection. Each shall attain it". But obviously there is a condition. That condition is he must follow his due duty. So the *Gita* says, this duty has to be carried out to earn him his proper dignity.

"Seer and leader
Provider and Server.
Each has the duty
Ordained by his nature
Born of the *gunas*."

What are these duties ?

They have been clearly earmarked. For instance: the Seers' duty :

"The Seers' duty
Ordained by his nature
Is to be tranquil

In mind and spirit
 Self controlled
 Austere and stainless,
 Upright, forbearing ;
 To follow wisdom,
 To know the *Atman*
 In the truth that is *Brahman*,
 Firm of faith.

So the task is not at all so easy. The seer, the spiritual pathfinder who has been given the highest place, may come from any caste, creed, but will have to "perform the duties and practise the virtues suitable to his individual being." One must carefully note it is here that the Lord observes that work is worship. It is through these activities, to himself, to his society and to his country that one can serve God. "This will ultimately help him to rise above both duty and virtue." By reaching perfection through this drill one reached the highest stage, "the highest ideal of man."

The teaching of the *Gita* leads a man to perfection. What are the vices or disqualifications that stand in the way to this ideal stage of perfection? That is through the inner light which is nothing but realising the inner self. One must know himself. One must truly do his bit. That is *karma*. *Karma* plays a very vital role in one's God-realization.

What is *karma*? *Karma* in simpler version means one's cultivation of good habits, good conduct, right way of living, right tendencies and right actions. God-realisation is possible only "by working out one's *karma* alone".

According to Swami Prabhavananda, an authority on spirituality, "The *Gita* further more explains how by fulfilling the law of one's being, and by offering the Lord all work and duties and virtues as worship, one may attain purity of heart, self control, and dispassionateness of spirit."

When a devoted housewife is serving the ailing child or the ill husband she is worshipping the Lord. When a mother is taking care of her son or feeding the members of the family she is worshipping the Lord. That is the spirit with which one

must interpret the real quintessence of the *Bhagavad Gita*. By doing so one gets rid of all the ills of life, all the evils of the inner self. What are these evils? They are six—*Kaam*, (lust) *Krodh*, (anger) *Lobh* (greed), *Moha* (Jealousy) *Matsarjya* (power or violence) and *Mada* (pride). The goal for all men is the same *viz.* to explore the Truth. This is a universally accepted truism. The ways to reach this goal, vary from man to man. The *Gita* says, "The special requirement of individuals—varying with their nature, tendencies, temperaments—must be recognised; and man has to be treated as a spiritual being in the process of formation." This brings us to the real importance of the scriptures." Hence the necessity of an accepted scripture or a teacher to enable a person to know what particular ideals are suited to the laws of his own life and being, and will therefore best help him to move towards perfection."

This simple life, pure and serene, without lust, greed, anger, desire, pride leads him to a stage of the ever blissful. That is a stage where every human being finds the divinity in everything—not only creatures but also in the inanimates. The mind is absolutely free of the external things around him. He is absorbed in the Almighty God. He forgets the worldly things. The *Gita* describes this stage.

"The enlightened, the *Brahman* abiding
calm-hearted, unbewildered,
Is neither elated of the pleasant
Nor saddened by the unpleasant."

The mind is absorbed in a stage of ecstasy.

"His mind is dead
To the touch of the external
It is alive
To the bliss of the *Atman*.
Because his heart knows *Brahman*
His happiness is for ever."

Such an ecstatic stage comes not only to the heart of the seer or sage in the forest. It can come to the lowly or the poorest of the poor but a pure heart. India has produced

hundreds of enlightened souls who hailed from the huts and hamlets of rural poor India. They hailed from the house of a cobbler, a village smith, a potter, even a dacoit.

That is because after reaching the transcendent stage the supramental stage of mind, all the evils are washed away. The sinner is no longer a sinner. They all become seers. The *Gita* says,

“All consumed
Are their imperfections,
Doubts are dispelled
Their senses mastered,
Their every action
Is wed to the welfare
of fellow creatures :
Such are the Seers
Who enter *Brahman*
And know *Nirvana*.”

It elaborates further,

“Only that *yogi*
Whose joy is inward,
Inward his place
And his vision inward,
Shall come to *Brahman*
And know *Nirvana*.”

“The *Gita* teaches that through yogic practices of non attachment, and through freedom from lust and anger, one attains purity and perfection and everlasting peace (the peace that passeth all understanding) while still living in this world.”

This stage of the blissful is for all humankind irrespective of religion or region from which he hails. That is the universality of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. That is why it is the holy scripture to be studied by one and all. With this stage attained, the *yogin* or even the ordinary householder with inner enlightenment, finds a rapturous joy which he too cannot describe. This is something beyond description. This inexpressible joy

brings him closer to creator. He identifies himself completely with whatever comes before him. He starts liking them all. That state is described vividly in the *Gita*.

“His heart is with *Brahman*
His eyes in all things
Sees only *Brahman*
Equally present,
Knows his own *Atman*
In every creature,
And all creation
Within that *Atman*.”

Says Sri Krishna, “That *yogin* sees me in all things within me. He never loses sight of me, not I of him. He is established in union within me and worships me devoutly in all beings. That *yogin* abides in me, no matter what his mode of life.”

One must remember a vital point here. God is equally eager to look after his devotee as the devotee is earnest to see Him. In the *Gita*, Sri Krishna categorically says he is *Bhakta paradhina*. He is a captive of the devotee. What does it mean? It means by sheer devotion and nothing else one can conquer God. That devotion must be not only sincere and earnest, it should be totally pure. It must be complete surrender. It must be unconditional and complete. In the words of Sri Ramakrishana, it should be like the kitten who knows nothing but the mother cat which carries it from one place to another by its mouth. The kitten never resists. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa stressed the importance of this aspect of assurance by Sri Krishna to his devotees. He said, “if you go two steps to reach God, God will come four steps forward towards you.” In finality, God is identified with the devotee. That is the main attraction of deep loyalty and devotion. That is the teaching of the *Gita*. This is the only holy scripture which clearly declared, two thousand five hundred years ago, that there is no difference between the holy scripture, the divinity and the devotee.

God surrenders to his devotee. As a Father in Heaven looks after his children and takes full care of the sons or daug-

hters, similarly the Universal Father has promised in this holy scripture that he would take full care of his children. So the surrender is a two-way traffic. Unlike other philosophic treatises, where one (Uni) minded devotion is prescribed as a panacea for God-realisation, the *Bhagavad Gita*, prescribes a two way traffic. That is a great assurance to the devotee. It is a great consolation to the spiritually hungry *yogin* aspiring for the divine glimpse.

Sri Krishna clearly says that he is a "captive" of the devotee. He surrenders himself to the way his devotee wants to worship him. He says in whatever form you worship me, I accept that

*Jo jatha maang prapadyantay
Taang sthatoiba vajamyahang.*

Thus spoke Sri Krishna to Arjuna, "He who dances before me uttering my (holy) name, he who remembers me through music, I tell you truly, rather I vouchsafe, I am purchased by Him." What else can one expect from his God? This unique relation between the served and worshipper is an ideal one.

Sri Krishna is worshipped in many forms. Some worships him as an incarnation of God. To him he had been the Lord. To somebody he is worshipped as a son—*Balagopal*. These worshippers believe or at least consider themselves as Yasoda, the Mother of Sri Krishna. He is worshipped by these groups as *Nandalal*.

Some worship him in the form of a deeply personal friend. They worship him considering themselves as Sri Radha. Mahaprabhu Chaitanya worshipped Sri Krishna considering himself as Sri Radha. This unique love for the dearest one gives them an unparalleled closeness. This proximity finally identified the two as one.

In some cases the Lord even has stopped to the devotees including Sri Radha. In Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, one day (the saint of the early 12th century), he was narrating a scene where Sri Radha was upset by long lingering for Sri Krishna. Sri Radha refused to even talk to Sri Krishna when the Lord

approached her and expressed his repentance for long separation. But Sri Radha would not budge an inch. There Jayadeva went to the extent of even Sri Krishna touching the feet of Radha. He had of course his reservations on second thought. So he deleted this portion and went for a holy river bath. It is recorded by Jayadeva himself how on his return he found the description reinstated. That is the yearning of the Lord for his disciples !

The greatest quality of this holy scripture is its sweetness. As one recites it more and more one gets absorbed in it fully. So it has been rightly observed by a scholar, 'The *Gita* is the most excellent nectarine milk, drawn by the cowherd's son Krishna as its milker, from the cow of the *Upanishads*, using Arjuna as the calf. All men of purified intellect are the consumers of that milk'.

The *Gita* has been accepted as a universal holy scripture for the humankind. That is why there are more than fifty English versions of the *Gita* besides many European and other languages.

One must have complete faith in one's conviction. While offering salutations, the seer convincingly says, "I salute Madhava (Another name of Sri Krishna), the Supreme Blissfull one, by whose grace a dumb man can become eloquent, and a lame person crosses over mountains."

That is the miracle of the Lord's blessings—*Kripa*. He must shower his blessings on the devotee. Without that nothing is possible. And for getting that blessing one has to culture the mind. Unless the field is well tilled, well nurtured the farmer would never waste the seeds.

Sri Krishna is the Supreme Lord. He is worshipped by Brahma, Varuna, Indra, Rudra through divine hymns. He is praised by the singers of *Saman* through chanting of the *Veda* with all complementary part sections and *Upanishads*. Sri Krishna is the divine Supreme whom the ascetics, the *yogins* intuit with minds, concentrated in meditation and whose limit neither the hosts of *Devas* nor of *Asuras* could ever fathom or realise.

WHAT IS SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA ?

One must know what is the background of this great holy scripture *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. To go to the origin you will find "*The Srimad Bhagavad Gita* occur in the *Bhisma Parva* of the *Mahabharata* and comprises 18 chapters from the 25th to the 42nd. The discourse between Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield, on the eve of the war which forms the subject matter of the work, was strung together in seven hundred verses and put in its place, in the body of his great history by Maharshi *Veda Vyasa*."

The credit for compiling the great epic goes to the eminent enlightened sage Maharshi Vyasa to whom every reader of the *Gita* offers special prayer. The prayer is universal. It says, "Salutation to thee, O Vyasa, of mighty intellect and with eyes large like the petals of full blown lotus, by whom was lighted the lamp of wisdom, full of the *Mahabharata* oil".

One must note these salutations are offered to the sage even before offering prayer to Sri Krishna which follows immediately. The hymn to Sri Krishna intones, "Salutation to Krishna, the holder of *Jnanamudra*, granter of desires of those who take refuge in Him, the milker of the *Gita*—nectar in whose hand is the cane of driving cows.

Maharshi Vyasa is immortal even physically. Among the immortal great saints and Godmen like Maruti (Hanumanji) Maharshi Vyasa is also immortal. He, it must be remembered, appeared in person in Varanasi to bless Bhagwan Sankaracharya to preach *Vedanta* when Sanatan Hindu religion was facing almost extinction.

Why the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* was written at all? Why not just a narration in continuation did not justify the main story of the *Mahabharata* ?

These are valid questions.

Why Dhritarastra was blind ? It was not simply a physical blindness. It was deeply symbolic. Had Dhritarastra

been concerned to the righteous course of events there could have been no Kurukshetra War. Had he managed the Kauravas, his sons, the events would have taken an altogether different turn. But that did not happen. The disgrace of the Pandavas was complete when one of Dhritarastra's sons (Duhshasan) even tried to disrobe Droupadi in the open royal court. What did Dhritarastra do then? Nothing. He was not only blind physically, he was blind to the entire events before him. As the ruling King he must have got all the news. *Raja Kernena Pashyati*, the king sees with his ears. That is a part of royal administration.

Dhritarastra never intervened. He never warned his unruly sons whose demeanour was definitely not beyond questioning. Now that a war was impending he was informed of the dangerous moves. Maharshi Vyasa, in his wisdom and out of his spiritual power even offered to get Dhritarastra's vision back. Dhritarastra declined the offer. He did not like to see the events of inner fighting. To quote a great scholar, "The *Gita* opens with Dhritarastra's query to Sanjaya about the progress of events. In the second chapter of the *Bhisma Parva* we find Maharshi Vyasa offering the power of sight to the blind king (so) that he might see the war. Dhritarastra declined to have it, saying he did not care to have eyes with which only to see the death of his own people; but he did not like to hear what was happening. On this the great Rishi Vyasa said, that all the occurrence in connection with war would be reflected in the mind of Sanjaya, and he would faithfully report them to Dhritarastra."

Sanjaya plays the role of a war correspondent. The whole *Gita* consists of the description of the Kurukshetra war events by Sanjaya. He plays the role of the news bearer to Dhritarastra.

Sanjaya, the reporter narrated the entire story in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna, God personified (worshipped as Narayana) and Arjuna "*who represents nara or a man.*" The *Gita* has been truly a long dialogue between Nara and Narayana. The *Gita* has been truly described as "the song of God chanted in thrilling notes to human ears." In brief, it

represents various views, in a harmonious tune, of Indian school of thoughts. "Each school of philosophy in India has found in it the source of its metaphysical system, and from it, every philosopher or saint has drawn inspiration." The holy scriptures present in capsule form the quintessence of all different religious thoughts.

According to Sri Aurobindo, who was brought up in an entirely different background in the west and never heard of *Vasudeva* (Sri Krishna) whom he saw in a vision while practising yoga in the prison cell, "the *Gita* is not a weapon for dialectical warfare, it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience, and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme region. It maps out, but it does not cut up or build walls or hedges to confine our vision."

That is the catholicity of the substance of the main idea in the *Gita*.

THE THREE SECTIONS OF THE HOLY BOOK

Scholars have given different versions. Some have a tendency of dividing the whole book into three parts. They observe that the first deals with *Karma Yoga* or the part showing the path of work. In this section the greatest stress is on work. It is action-oriented. The second part deals with knowledge. So it is known as *Jnana Yoga*, the path of knowledge. Here the saintly scholars insist on knowledge or real truth about oneself. One must admit, there is a link between the first and the second. The third section concerns *Bhakti* or Devotion and is known as *Bhakti yoga*. All the three are interconnected. They interact with each other. Sri Aurobindo tells us, "the noble path (*Jnana* and *Karma*) becomes the triune way of knowledge, works and devotion. And the fruit of the sacrifice, the one fruit still placed before the seeker is attained—union with the divine. Being and oneness with the Supreme divine nature."

REAL SUBJECT MATTER

So through a combined effort of the three ways that is, *knowledge (Jnana)* *work (Karma)* and *unstinted devotion*

(*Bhakti*) one can practise meditation which is to him *Raja yoga*. This is the path of transcendental meditation which gives one "poise, self control, tranquility and the meditative life."

According to Swami Prabhavananda, "the first book (or section of the *Gita*) comprising the first six chapters deals with the true nature of the *Tvam* or thou (i.e. the true nature of the self), a word that appears in the great vedantic saying *Tat Tvam Asi*—Thou art that. The second book (or section of the *Gita*) explains the nature of *Tat*, or that; and the last book brings out the identity of thou with that. Thus the great vedantic truth embodied in the saying *Thou art that* forms the (real) subject matter of the *Gita*, and the whole poem is only an exposition of its meaning."

This is an excellent interpretation of the holy scripture which gives easy access to the treatise by the ordinary man and the real seeker of Truth. It serves the purpose of understanding the all embracing real message of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, which otherwise, because of too much of metaphysical jargons have been made quite difficult for the ordinary reader, specially the layman.

SUMMARY OF THE GITA

The *Gita* consists of eighteen chapters. In these chapters Sri Krishna outlines the philosophy of living—One may say, in modern terminology, the art of living. This living is in peace, away from the humdrum stress and strain in life. People's desire has no end. It is this desire, rather greed, that introduces clashes of interest as it did in the *Mahabharata*. The Kauravas were insisting on grabbing the entire kingdom just for their enjoyment. They thought the Pandavas were in minority and would be unable to resist. So it was a case of pure usurpation. The muscle power of Duryodhan and his brothers was being stressed too further. So the giver of righteousness, justice and due dignity and regard to humanity, wanted Arjuna to revolt. He wanted the man in the prince to be awakened.

The first six chapters are grief of Arjuna, the way of knowledge, the way of Action, the way of renunciation of

Action in knowledge, the way of renunciation and the way of meditation. In brief these divine words want to tell human kind to look at "the path of work without desire for fruits". Work properly, righteously and correctly. Do not care for the fruits. The underlying assurance is, that fruit will certainly reach you one day.

The second phase of the epic consists of the next six chapters. The way of knowledge with realisation, the way of imperishable *Brahman*, the way of the kingly knowledge and the kingly secret, the Glimpse of the divine Glory, the Vision of the Universal form and the way of devotion. These six chapters—are to lead one to the real path through unstinted devotion and complete surrender to God.

The last six chapters give the final, highest knowledge knowing One's own self. As a great Saint has recorded. "The central teaching of the *Gita* is the attainment of Freedom, by performance of one's *Swadharma* or duty in life. Do thy duty without an eye to the results thereof. Thus should'st thou gain the purification of heart which is essential for *moksha* (salvation) seem to be the keynote of Krishna's teachings to Arjuna."

It is a call to protest against injustice. It is a call to stand against torture and oppression. It is a call to enkindle one's innerself and get rid of the darkness of absence of knowledge. It is knowledge that reigns supreme. That knowledge is real power. Everything else is only a temporary myth. *Gita* contains the essence of self knowledge. It gives supreme self confidence in a man's struggle for existence. The muscle power, material greed, the pomp and show are only temporal. They fade into insignificance when one succeeds in exploring the real truth in his own inner spiritual unlimited fountain of force.

At no other time was the relevance of the message of the *Gita* so needed as it is today when the whole world is so bewildered and confused. It is running after a mirage of materialistic *Eldorado*. It is destroying its own creator. It is

stiffing its own inner voice. The universal self in its subtle aspect; the centre from which all living beings have their sense-power.

IMPACT OF THE GITA ON CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

The *Gita* is the holiest of the scriptures of the Hindus. It has a message for the whole of humankind. It is "the most popular and at the same time the most profound."

Modern interpretations of the *Gita*, for instance, one by Rishi Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Sri Krishna Charit*, has indentified Sri Krishna as a great man—statesman, a diplomat and a king of philosophers. The scripture has definitely deeply drenched an Indian heart. There is hardly any Hindu household where you won't find a discussion on the holy scriptures at least once a month.

There are many individuals, including housewives not only in cities, even in the remote corners of villages in India who can recite the whole of the text from their memory. In the cultural heritage of India, therefore, the role of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* is the highest. It is known from the peasant to the highest philosopher.

All searchers of Truth study it. An eminent Muslim patriot and scholar, Syed Masood once told the late Mrs. Indra Gandhi how a learned German Professor once asked him in Germany whether he had studied the *Gita*. On being told that he was a Muslim and did not go through it, the learned German scholar expressed his shock and told, "but you are an Indian. Are'nt you?" The student scholar answered in the affirmative. "Then you must study the *Gita*. If you want to know India you must study the *Gita*. It mirrors the soul of India." He did study the *Gita* and reported back to his Professor.

The great saints of India from ancient days to modern period have been interpreting the inner meaning of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. All ancient Acharyas and Saints from Shankracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Madhusudana have

treated it as the torch bearer to knowledge. They have all written erudite commentaries on the *Gita*.

Mahaprabhu Chaitanya became a part of the scripture itself as he devoted all his days and nights in Krishana consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna would regularly recite *Bhagavad Gita* for mankind's real spiritual progress. Among the great national leaders Sri Aurobindo's famous *Essays on the Gita*, Radha krishnan's the *Bhagavad Gita*, Bala Gangadhar Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* are indeed most charming. The great Saint Jnaneswar made the great epic available to the ordinary people by writing its commentaries in simple Marathi. The metaphysical roots of evils are traced. The *Bhagavad Gita* has been truly described as "a resume of the philosophies, ethical systems and schools of spiritual culture that existed at the time." Mahaprabhu Sakar Deva had popularised the message of the *Gita* in his masterly books in Assamese and Sanskrit. His *Kirtan Ghoshali* an outstanding treatise. In twenty three lucid chapters the great enlightened saint presented the substance of the epic to the ordinary man. It was considered as an epitome of the philosophy of the *Bhagavad Dharma* and "lives in the ear like music that can never be forgotten."

Besides these great masters who lived and died for God realisation and presented the essence of the *Gita* in their own ways, even many foreign scholars had attempted to realise the truth in the *Gita*. For instance Poet George Russel has lamented and observed and correctly the *Gita* "is a highly spiritual book on which thousands of commentaries have been written, but its teachings have not yet been realised."

Truly speaking the essence and quintessence of the *Gita* would flower one's own life. "It required beyond intellectual analysis and understanding an occult and mystical opening."

The *Bhagavad Gita* has been translated not only in all Indian languages, but in all major languages of the world.

What is the message of the *Gita* ? The main teaching of the holy scripture "relate to that yoga which is a harmonious combination of devotion, action, concentration and knowledge.

Leaving aside the pure Samkhya type of aspirants as exceptional, the *Gita* emphatically asserts the necessity of proper work in a scheme of harmonious spiritual growth."

The *Gita* clearly tells you that devotion and knowledge are interdependent. "Realisation of the experience formulated in all this is *Vasudeva* (Sri Krishna's another name), and perfect surrender and shown to be the result of nature knowledge."

The life of Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya is a living example of the Krishna consciousness as preached and described in *Bhagavad Gita*. The utterance of the very name of Krishna would immediately lead him to *Samadhi* (trance). Chaitanya Mahaprabhu surrendered himself completely at the feet of Sri Krishna. It has been observed, "this realisation comes to the aspirant as a result of Divine grace, which is essentially a corollary of devotion and the consequence of the supreme devotional act of self surrender to which the divine teacher of the *Bhagavad Gita* exhorts all devotees. The growth of devotion up to this stage of full enlightenment through grace is also described fully."

One can never have true love for God unless one knows the glory of the Lord. His greatness is unlimited. According to the *Gita* this love for God "is fostered by and converted into a flaming energy by *niskama karma* and *jnan yoga*. This unattached and selfless work is the keynote to one's God realisation Sri Ramkrishna too used to say, "when you weep for the Lord with all your heart and soul, when you love Him limitlessly, He is bound to appear before you. Unfortunately we do not practise it. We weep in abundance for our spouses, children, friends and relations but not for God." The *Gita* says, "When love deepens and ends in absolute self surrender, the grace of God descends on the aspirants." It also clearly observes that when this phase appears, "this destroys the distinction between *bhakti* and *jnan* (devotion and knowledge) by bringing both to their common end of experience of God, in which to know Him is to love Him and love Him is to know Him. This experience comes when grace destroys the cloud of ignorance and with it, the stain of sin that has its seat in the senses, the mind, and the intellect." Then only the aspirant can enter

into Him forthwith. He is identified and unified with the divine life. It is like a streamlet mingling into the vast ocean. There is no separate identity. He becomes one with Him, This can be practised by every one. This has been achieved even by many householders. For, the *Gita* says, "He (the devotee) may take full part in all the activities of the world, but he always abides in God, and to him belong Supreme peace and the eternal abode." "Life itself, transcending all narrow notions of individual spiritual growth" bring to the devotee's doorstep the divine knowledge.

Now, how to reach this goal? By *niskama karma*, non attachment. How to attain non-attachment? "The *Gita* prescribes two ways to attain it: The way of knowledge for meditative type of men and the way of selfless action, men of action."

This devotion may be personal or impersonal. The *Gita* prescribes both the paths of knowledge and the way of devotion. Many Saints—Mahaprabhu Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa chose the path of devotion. Although both had tasted supremely high stage of *knowledge* themselves both prescribed *Devotion* as the path to God-realisation. Both were convinced from personal spiritual experiment and experience that "merely an intellectual grasp of the illusory nature of the world will not help the devotee."

KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS

Krishna consciousness through the message of the *Gita* today has become a world movement. Many western scholars are taking keen interest in *Krishna consciousness*. The Krishna cult is now becoming more and more a reply to the problems of stress and strain. According to one great western scholar "Krishna, the Blessed Lord, God of peace and salvation' is personified in the *Bhagavad Gita* and speaks to the warrior Arjuna on the importance of the denial of materialism and the affirmation of the spirit as the ultimate truth. The teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita* or the Lord's song are basic in all Hindu religious belief. Written in the second century B.C. during what is known as the Epic period these dialogues embody the *Vedic* wisdom and faith."

The substance as presented by two western scholars has equally well received by Indian counterparts. They subtly observe how Krishna wanted Arjuna to forget about his attachment to relation and do his duty rightly. Quite rightly Commins and Linscott noted the observation of Sri Krishna to Arjuna. "The Deity said, Doubtless, O you of mighty arms ! the mind it may be restrained by constant practice and by indifference to worldly objects. It is my belief, that devotion is hard to obtain for one who does not restrain his self. But by one who is self-restrained and assiduous, it can be obtained through proper expedients."

Truly speaking this has been one of the most important teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

The two scholars also observed how (in the *Gita*) "The devotee is esteemed higher than the performers of penances, higher even than the men of knowledge ! and the devotee is higher than the men of action, therefore O Arjuna become a devotee. And even among all devotees he who, being full of faith, worships me, with his inmost self intent on me, is esteemed to be the devoted."

Today the cult of Sri Krishna is not only restricted to India, the *Hare Krishna* movement is gaining popularity in many parts of the world. There are thousands of foreign spiritually hungry devotees who worship Sri Krishna as an incarnation of God. Thanks to the great efforts of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the founder of the International Society for Krishna consciousness, Sri Krishna's philosophy as enunciated in the *Gita* is a living religion in many parts of the world. It has been flourishing in the United States of America. He reached U.S.A. and thought of starting his institution in New York city in 1965. In 1968 he set up *New Vrindavana*, "an experimental *Vedic* community in the hills of West Virginia." The experiment proved a grand success. It is "now a thriving farm community of more than one thousand acres, his students have since founded several similar communities in the United States and abroad.",²

At Mayapur in West Bengal an attractive Centre of Krishna consciousness is going to attract thousands of thirsty

souls as a spiritual city. The holy city of Puri in Orissa too has a big centre.

Within two decades (the ISCON was started in July, 1966) of its activities the body has done considerable work in popularising the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. Prabhupada's works have been translated in 23 languages and are respectfully received by the readers. It is recorded, "Highly respected by the academic community for their authoritativeness, depths and clarity, they are used as standard text books in numerous colleges. A special trust has been set up to popularise Prabhupada's celebrated multi-volume translation and commentary on *Srimad Bhagavata*. The learned Krishna devotee has circled the whole world at least a dozen times on lecture tours to popularise the holy message of Sri Krishna.

CONCLUSION

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a guide to our daily life with its stress and strain, sorrow and joy of life. According to the *Gita* a really learned man will accept both coolly and calmly. Whether in calamity or in grim misery, a realised soul would never lose the balance of mind. He is *sthitaprajna*—unperturbed.

Life is like a very ordinary dress. A man's death is like changing one's dress. The body is mortal but not soul. It continues. In a famous canto in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says

*Basansi jirani yatha bihaya
Nabani grinhati naroparani
Tatha sharirani bihaya jirnani
Anyani sanyati nabani dehi.*

Srimad Bhagavad Gita is not a separate treatise. From the *Vedas*, we get the *Upanishads*. From the *Upanishads* we get the *Gita*. In fact Dr. Radhakrishnan clearly says that the philosophic background of the *Gita* is taken from the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. In his chapter on "the theism of the *Bhagavad Gita*" Dr. Radhakrishnan observed :

"The *Gita* does not throw overboard the authority of the *Vedas*. It considers the *Vedic* injunctions to be quite

valid for men of a particular cultural status. One cannot attain perfection, according to the *Gita*, without obeying the ordinances of the *Vedas*. Sacrificial acts are required to become obstacle to the attainment of supreme perfection. The exalted character of the *Vedic* Gods is not accepted. Though the *Vedic* observance secure for us power and wealth, they do not take us straight to freedom. Deliverance can be found by the discovery of self. When the secret of salvation is in our vision, there is no need for the performance of *Vedic Karma*."

There is a continuity of link from the ancient to the present philosophical thinking, through the *Gita*.

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5

Impact of the Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita on Indian Culture

The great Trinity of the South—*Bhagwan* Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya, who carried the banner of *Vedanta* ever at the top, based their works mainly on the *Upanishads* and *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. The later has been described and included by many as another *Upanishad*. They all reiterated and preached the religious synthesis of the different views and practices on the basic monistic idealism as envisaged in the different versions of the *Upanishads*. Bhagwan Sankaracharya's concept of *Advaita* is clearly a reply of the *Upanishadic* thinking where the ancient sage says *Eko devah Sarba bhuteshu guruh, Sarbabyapi Sarba bhutantaratma*. (God is one. He is all pervading. He dwells in everything in every human heart).

Professor A.L. Basham believes that there are similarities of ideas among Buddhism, Jainism and *Upanishads*. In his well known *A Cultural History of India* he wrote, (page 101), "The age Mahavira lived in, was marked by great philosophical speculation, in which a number of eminent teachers participated, both *Brahmanas* and *Sramanas*. The seeds of the *atma* doctrine of the *Upanishads* and further flowering of religious systems like

Ajivikism Jainism and Buddhism are to be assigned to this period."

Among the modern builders of India, the father of Indian Renaissance Movement, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Acharya Keshab Sen, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, all were deeply infused with the fresh light of the *Vedas*, especially after the rediscovery of the most ancient *Rig Veda* scriptures by the great saintly scholar Professor Max Muller. A number of other scholars were also attracted to the study of this rich ancient literature and this awakened the newly enlightened modern builders of India. The history of Indian cultural heritage acquired a new turn.

IMPACT OF VEDAS AND UPANISHADS ON RAJA RAM MOHAN ROY

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, popularised the *Vedas* in the vernacular languages. He himself translated a number of the *Upanishads*. At a time when people in India under the influence of an exploitative priestly class, were sunk neck deep in meaningless ritualism and superstitious beliefs, Ram Mohan tried to blaze new trails of a rational way of life. He roused an independent spirit in India. Particularly in Bengal, and provided a dynamic direction to that spirit. All his thoughts were drenched with the *Upanishadic* ideas.

He sought to overcome narrow sectarianism and social evils of his times through an "enlightened" way of life, based on a fusion of what was best in the Western and Eastern cultures. His teachings represented a healthy synthesis of the human principles in Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity.

He was not a founder or prophet of a new religion. The *Brahmo Samaj*, owing its origin to Ram Mohan, was only a common meeting place for people belonging to all religious communities, irrespective of their differences. Ram Mohan's basic postulate was that "the true way of serving God is to do good to man."

He occupies a unique place in the history of the renascent India. Many of the principal social, religious, political and

educational movements of the nineteenth century originated from him. He belongs to the lineage of great seers who, at times, appear in the arena of history, to guide men in his eternal quest for better ways of life.

Ram Mohan was convinced that unless translated into one's mother tongue, mere recitation of the *Vedas* was meaningless. He wanted to popularise the *Vedanta* and *Upanishads*.

Extensive studies in religion and philosophy, law and administration, politics and social reform were a life-long passion with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. His voluminous writings on these subjects, to the discussion of which he brought a mind trained in the best cultures of East and West, would serve as a standing monument to his literary genius. *He was longing to bring the Vedic views to the doorsteps of the masses.* So he brought out a standard work on the *Vedanta* in Bengali (1816) and later in English also. He himself translated the *Kena*, *Isha*, *Mundaka* and *Katha Upanishads*. This clearly showed how painstakingly, in spite of his busy schedule he wanted the ancient ideas to be popular and meaningfully translated to practical day to day life.

Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, the leader of the *Brahmo* movement made *Upanishad* the keynote of all his preaching, teaching and thinking. Great many learned *Acharyas*, like Vijay Krishna Goswami were appointed to take up the task of preaching the teaching for the *Upanishads*. *Upanishads* were translated into regional languages for the laymen, as they were so long restricted only to the four walls of the Sanskrit scholars.

There were reasons for that. So long, Indian thinking was restricted only to Sanskrit. The new light came through the knowledge of English. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. The contact with the English knowing nations made Indians wiser. In fact, great reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy took the trouble of reaching London to plead for English instead of Sanskrit (Wilson was a great supporter of Sanskrit) as a *lingua franca* and a link language. The Raja breathed

his last in Bristol. Ram Mohan knew a number of languages and his authentic works are available in English, Bengali, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and Urdu. He had a mastery over *Upanishads*. He was the first to revolt against the old mundane ill interpreted directions of the professional Brahmin priests who had shut the door of knowledge to the weaker members of the society. They did it quite strategically. All the social rituals were conducted only in Sanskrit. The religious discoveries were imparted only in Sanskrit. The Raja was the first to call a halt to this old practice.

Side by side with the *Brahmo Samaj* Movement, was started another strong socio-religious movement through the *Arya Samaj* by the great Saint Dayanand Sarasvati. The saint-social reformer laid greatest stress on the *Vedic* knowledge. He clearly indicated that only the *Vedas* contained real and realised knowledge. Swami Dayanand Sarasvati decried idolatry. He shunned all ritualistic activities except as directed by the *Vedic* and finally *Upanishadic* literature. Sacrificial Fire became a more or less compulsory ritual for those who followed the *Arya Samaj* Movement. Swami Dayananda, a learned scholar in Sanskrit gave a new interpretation of the *Vedas* in his masterly analysis published under the title *Satyartha Prakash*, offering the substance of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. That was one of the earliest versions in a popular form that the Indians got a fresher approach and access to the *Vedic* literature. That too was more than a hundred years ago. Maharshi Dayanand Sarasvati started educational institutions where imparting knowledge of the *Vedas* was made more or less compulsory. These institutions with rich traditions and background—known as Anglo *Vedic* (DAV) Colleges—definitely played an important role in the renaissance of India particularly in northern India. They are carrying that flag proudly even today.

REVIVAL OF VEDAS BY DAYANAND SARASWATI

Maharshi Dayanand was a great Sanskrit scholar. He popularised the *Vedic* thoughts in easier form translating and popularising it to the masses. He was convinced that real

knowledge was only revealed knowledge. Only the *Vedas* were fountain source of all knowledge. "*Go back to the Vedas*" was his slogan. The great historian Dr. R.C. Majumdar has recorded, "He wanted to shape society on the model of *Vedas* by removing all later outgrowths. He not only disregarded the authority of the later scriptures like the *Puranas*, but had no hesitation in declaring them to be the writing of selfish, ignorant men. His basic standpoint was therefore exactly that of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the detailed view of both were, to a great extent, similar. Like the Raja, Dayanand believed in one God and decried polytheism and the use of images. He also raised his voice against the restrictions of caste, child marriage and prohibition of sea voyage and encouraged female education and remarriage of widows."

The Maharshi emphatically stressed to his innumerable followers : "The *Veda* is the scripture of the knowledge. It is the paramount duty of every Aryan to learn, teach, hear and preach the *Veda*. We should ever be ready to accept Truth and to renounce untruth. All acts should be done according to *Dharma* after a thorough investigation of right and wrong."

Maharshi Dayanand was convinced that "any scientific theory of principle which is thought to be a modern origin may be probed to be set forth in the *Vedas*."

About the biggest mystery of the world, the creation of earth, Maharshi Dayanand gave a clear-cut explanation. Basing his description on the *Vedas*, the saint reformer noted "As to why God created the world, we reply that the *Jiva* (soul) and the material cause of the Universe are eternal by nature, and the actions of individuals and the visible world are phenomenally eternal. At the time of dissolution some actions of men remain unrewarded, unpunished and it is with the objects of meting out to them rewards of their actions that God created the world and dispensed impartial justice. Further the attributes of knowledge, power, mercy and creation, inherent in God also call for their natural and legitimate exercise, and hence God created the world. Just as eyes are meant to see and ears to hear with, even so the creative power of the deity exists, for creation. God had created the world for the

exercise of his powers so that His creatures may benefit themselves by the innumerable things it contains. He has blessed them with eyes, etc. for the attainment of *dharmā*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Similarly, there are many other reasons for the creation of the world and they cannot be all set forth here in consequence of time at my disposal being short. The wise can think them out for themselves."

The *Satyārtha Prakash*, the greatest work of Maharshi Dayanand in which he set out his ideas and beliefs, was published from Varanasi in 1875. At the end of this book he gives a fifty-one article summary of his faith. These can be summarised mainly under five heads :

- (1) **Authorities** : The four *Vedas*, which are the words of God are absolutely free from error and are an authority unto themselves. They do not stand in need of any other books to uphold their authority.
- (2) **Philosophy** : He who is called the *Brahman* or Most High or *Paramatma*, the Supreme Spirit who permeates the whole universe, who is personification *Sat-Chit-Anand*, unborn, infinite, almighty, just and merciful, who creates, sustains and dissolves the universe and who awards all souls the fruit of their deeds. He is the Great God.
- (3) **Ethics** : *Dharma* is the practice of equitable justice together with that of truthfulness in word, deed and thought and the like virtues—in a word, that which is in conformity with the will of God as embodied in the *Vedas*. The class and order, i.e., the *varna* and *ashrama* of an individual should be determined by his merits.
- (4) **Sadhanas** : The means of salvation are the worship of God, the performance of righteous, the acquisition of true knowledge by the practice of *brahmacharya*, the society of the wise and the learned purity of thought and life of activity etc.
- (5) **Rituals** : The *Samskaras* are those rites which contribute to the physical, mental and spiritual improvement of man. From conception to cremation there are

sixteen *samskaras* whose due observance should be obligatory on all.

Agnihotra (fire-offering) contributes to the purification of air and thus promotes the well-being of all.

In the words of the great western orientalist Romain Rolland, "Indian religious thought raised a purely Indian *Samaj*, and at its head was a personality of the highest order, Dayanand Saraswati. This man with the nature of a lion is one of those whom Europe is too apt to forget when she judges India. He was that rare combination, a thinker of action with a genius for leadership. He was hero of the *Iliad* or of the *Gita* with the athletic strength of a Hercules, who thundered against all forms of thought other than his own, the only true one. He was so successful that in five years Northern India was completely changed."

The flag of Raja Ram Mohan was carried forward by the eminent reformer and learned scholar Keshab Sen. Keshab, it has been recorded by foreign historians and Chroniclers, was undoubtedly the greatest orator in whole of British empire. Crowds used to throng wherever he would go—in the country and abroad—to deliver a lecture. All his philosophical discourses drew their inspiration from the lofty ideas of the *Upanishads*.

Ram Mohan was there earlier. Maharshi Dayanand missed him. But Dayanandji, did not miss Keshab Sen who was his contemporary. Both were most modern in their outlook. Both had an inner urge to change the socio-religious face of India. Both drew their inspiration from the teachings of *Upanishads*. Both had dreamt of modernising Indians with the Scientific way of thinking as envisaged through the *Upanishads*. In fact both Maharshi Dayananda Saraswati and Keshab Sen had held meetings a number of times where they were seriously thinking of merging the two organisations—the *Arya Samaj* and the *Brahmo Samaj*—into one. The leaders, with higher ideas, wiser approach and wider vision, agreed but not their followers. Nonetheless, this clearly manifested how the *Upanishads* had brought the most learned leaders and social reformers closer.

The same can be said of another equally important movement in Bombay and neighbouring areas led by Justice Maharshi Govinda Ranade who too set up an organisation known as *Prarthana Samaj*. The main idea behind this movement also was to give the Indians the modern light of progress against the background of the rich ancient Indian cultural heritage. The *Prarthana Samaj*, played the same role in Southern and Western India as the *Arya Samaj* and the *Brahmo Samaj* did in northern areas. All the three had their foundation on the Upanishadic ideas.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE UPANISHAD PERSONIFIED

The most dynamic among the modern Saints and social reformers—a prince among patriots, Swami Vivekananda drew his main inspiration from the *Upanishads*. The number of great centres of *Vedanta Societies* organised by the Swami showed his earliest desire to familiarise the western mind with our *Vedas*. *Upanishads* and *Vedanta* which are all identical and derive their roots from the same realised divine knowledge of the ancient sages and seers. The motto of the Ramakrishna Mission, the mighty organisation with world-wide network is *Uthisthata, jagrata, prapya baranibodhata: Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached*. This famous line is from the *Katha Upanishad*.

There are regular classes run by the dedicated learned monks of the Ramakrishna Mission who are imparting detailed inner meaning of the *Upanishads* throughout India and abroad. This is being carried out regularly as instructed and directed by Swami Vivekananda. A number of learned Swamis of the organisation have attempted easier popular versions of the *Upanishads* to bring it to the doorsteps of the common man. Some of them have been done in collaboration with western scholars whose thirst for secret of Indian philosophy impelled them to learn Sanskrit. Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood Fredrick Manchester are only a few to mention.

Swami Vivekananda exhorted that mere recitations of the *Vedas* or *Upanishads* or *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* won't do. One

must try to realise its inner meaning. The great Swami noted, "He who knows the secret of the Vedas, not book worms, not grammarians not Pandits in general, but he who knows the meaning. An ass laden with a load of sandal wood knows only the weight of the wood, but not its precious qualities. So are these Pandits, we do not want such people. What can they teach if they have no realisation ?

The keynote of these three great philosophical treatises in one word has been *renunciation*. Swamiji observed, "Renunciation has conquered India, in days of yore, it has still to conquer India. Still it stands the greatest and highest of Indian ideals—This renunciation."

No literature—ancient philosophy has had such continuing flow. One must note almost all other ancient civilisations Roman, Greek, Egyptian—have gone into the background. The only ancient civilisation that has a continuous progress like an unending undulation of a river is that of Indian civilisation. That is because all the saints and sages, ages after ages, gave the same Truth after their own enlightenment. A very significant aspect of Indian spirituality and its gradual growth has been non-interference by the rulers. Right from ancient India till today a sage or a seer has had an upper hand. His has been the final word and verdict. He has been the guide. He was never rich. He did not like to be rich, rather he hated it. The sage considered it a disqualification to amass wealth. Strangely enough all the sages from all the regions of India have been giving the same keynote of Truth—*renunciation*. Swami Vivekananda observed, "The land of Buddha, the land of Shankara, Ramanuja, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the land of renunciation, the land where from the days of yore, *Karma Kanda* was preached against, and even today there are hundreds who have given up everything, and have become *jivan muktas*—aye, will that land give up its ideals ? Certainly not."

VEDANTA IN ACTION :

TAGORE ON THE GREAT SWAMI

Appreciating the translation of *Vedanta* into action by the revolutionary monk of India, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore recorded :

"Vivekananda has said that there is the power of *Brahman* in every human being ; also that it is through the poor and the dispossessed that *Narayana* seeks and awaits our service. What a grand message : It lights up for man's consciousness the path to limitless liberation from the trammels and limitations of his self. This is not ethical injunction laying down any specific rule of conduct, no narrow commandment for regulation of our behaviour. Opposition to untouchability is inherent in the Message—opposition not on any ground of political expediency but because the Message is incompatible with insult to the humanity of Man, for untouchability is a self-inflicted insult to everyone of us.

And because the Message of Vivekananda is a call of awakening to the totality of our Manhood, that it has set so many of our youths on diverse paths to freedom through Work and through Renunciation and Sacrifice."

—(RABINDRANATH TAGORE : *PRABUDDHA BHARAT*, *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Number* May, 1963.)

However, the attraction of western luxurious way of living may be attractive and alluring. India would be the last land to join that procession. It is not in its attitude and does not fit in with the thinking of an Indian, to be dazzled by the mere glamour and lust of luxury. Some exceptional cases may be there but those were only transitory. "They are bound to come back to the fold. Swami Vivekananda noted, "There may be people whose brains have become turned by the western luxurious ideals : there may be thousands and hundreds of thousands who have drunk deep of enjoyment, this curse of the west, the senses, the curse of the world, yet for all that there will be other thousands in this motherland of mine to whom religion will be ever a reality, and who will be ever ready to give up without counting the cost if need be."

This great statement of Swami Vivekananda reflected the inner secret of the three great spiritual scriptures—The *Vedas*,

the *Upanishads* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* in flowering the lives of the ordinary Indian. These three scriptures repeat the same message.

All Indians, even of other main faiths, believe in the spirit of renunciation. Their scriptures too teach the same. The flow of thinking in the whole country, whether east or west, south or north is the same. That gives the supreme eternal *Truth* the key to cultural Heritage of India. In the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, "the way to reach or become the *Brahman* or God is called *Yoga*." There are many instances even in modern era of great seers attaining this Godhood. The latest was perhaps Sri Aurobindo, the sage of Pondicherry Ashram who got his *Yoga* training from Lele Maharaj and had the vision of *Vasudeva* even in the prison cell. Scholars observe, "The *Yoga* of the *Gita* is all comprehensive, unending within itself knowledge (*Jnana*), Meditation (*Dhyana*) of the self (*Atman*), Devotion to God (*Bhakti*) and selfless performance of one's duties (*Karma*). Man attains perfection knowing and worshipping God with his selfless performance of duty. God helps those who strive along this path by bestowing His grace on them. The self realised or Godly man does not run away from society, but remains in it and does the work which falls to his lot without desiring or demanding any gain for himself and leaving the reward to God. The life of *Lord Krishna* was a practical example of his teachings and is the best commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*."

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa has been a living example of the personification of the same during the modern era. Work without desire for fruit is the motto of thousands of selfless workers of the order in his mission which is serving humankind in the whole world today. That is *Vedanta* in action.

In the awakening of a sleeping India under foreign rule for one hundred and ninety years, imitating and accepting as the best whatever came from the west, a handful of great leaders played an all important role. We shall have chance to discover at length about their unstinted effort and dedicated service to the cause of rejuvenating the decadent and dying state of social condition and invigorate a limitless moral cum

spiritual mental force to get rid of the ordeal. All these stalwarts—at least forerunners of three separate movements—got their inspiration from the teachings of *Upanishads*. They got the real source of inspiration from the *Upanishads*. They inspired the whole of India to take up the challenge of foreign influence on Indian culture. In outlook, in demeanour, in way of living there came a rethinking. In the still stagnant streamlet a ripple was noticed. Nobody could ever imagine that a silent revolution had started. It was a social revolution to build up a resurgent self reliant India, a modern India, free from the domination of United Kingdom, France and Portugal.

The *Upanishads* turned them real practical *Vedantists*, practical *Karma Yogins*. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of modern India started the *Brahmo samaj*. There the main religious instructions were based on the *Upanishads*.

To quote Professor Basham, “In the religious sphere Ram Mohan’s main target of attack was the Hindu system of idolatory, its mythology and cult. He proposed as an alternative, a deistic type of theism, strongly influenced by European deism and the ideology of the Unitarians.”

Swamiji said, Buddha brought the *Vedanta* to light, gave it to the people and saved India. A thousand years after his death a similar state of things again prevailed. The mobs, the masses, and various races had been converted to Buddhism; naturally the teaching of the Buddha became in time degenerated, because most of the people were very ignorant. Buddhism taught no God, no Ruler of the Universe; so gradually the masses brought their gods, and devils, and hobgoblins out again, and a tremendous hotch-potch was made of Buddhism in India. Again materialism came to fore, taking the form of license with the higher classes and superstition with the lower. Then Shankaracharya arose and once more revived *Vedanta* philosophy. He made it a rationalistic philosophy. In the *Upanishads* the arguments are often very obscure. By Buddha, the moral side of the philosophy was laid stress upon and by Shankaracharya on the intellectual side. He worked out, rationalised and placed before men the wonderful coherent system of *Advaita*.

SRI AUROBINDO'S NEW REVELATION

A *Yogin* who had divine revelation in a prison cell, Sri Aurobindo is a modern Saint with a clear cut scientific approach to God-realisation. He drew his main inspiration from Yogic interpretation of the *Upanishads*.

The utterance of the mono syllable *Om* is the highest form of *Yoga*. No single sage or scholar was perhaps qualified or courageous enough to evaluate the literary splendour and philosophical depth of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* or the great epics—*Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in so crisp, lucid and simple expressions. Himself a great scholar in Greek, Latin, French, Sanskrit (he was introduced to Indian culture and Sanskrit last because his thoroughly westernised father wanted to keep him away from whatever concerned India and for that purpose sent all the three sons to London. Their tutors too were English women). Sri Aurobindo had a thorough background of comparative civilisation.

Sri Aurobindo wrote, "The early mind of India in the magnificent youth of the nation when a fathomless spiritual insight was at work, a subtle intuitive vision and a deep, clear and greatly outlined intellectual and ethical thinking and heroic action and creation which founded and traced the plan and made the permanent structure of her unique culture and civilisation, is represented by four of the Supreme productions of her genius, the *Veda*, the *Upanishads* and the vast epics, and each of them is of a kind, a form and an intention not easily paralleled in any other literature.

Sri Aurobindo accredited the highest tributes to the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* when he said, "The two first (*Veda* and *Upanishad*) are the visible foundation of her spiritual and religious being, the others a large creative interpretation of her greatest period of life, ideals that governed it and the figures in which she saw man and Nature and God and the powers of the universe." Wrote Sri Aurobindo, "The *Veda* gave us the first types and figures of these things as seen and formed by an imaged spiritual intuition and psychological and religious experiences."

The modern sage scanned the entire ancient literature scientifically. Somewhere else, Sri Aurobindo observed further, "*Veda* was a book of knowledge and even of the supreme knowledge a revelation, a great utterance of eternal and impersonal truth as it had seen and heard in the inner experience of inspired and semi-divine thinkers."

Summing up the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* what do we find? All these three great scholarly spiritual treatises with experiments of the numerous sages and seers teach us only one thing. In one word that is *Vairagya* or *renunciation*.

Swami Vivekananda, the modern seer who shook the whole world by his brilliant analysis of the secret of India's spiritual soul noted, "This *Vairagya* or renunciation is the very beginning of religion. How can religion or morality begin without renunciation itself? The *Alpha* and *Omega* is renunciation. Give up, says the *Veda*—give up. That is the only way. *Na prajayo dhanena tyagena Kenamrityamanev*. Neither through wealth, nor through progeny but by giving up alone, that immortality is to be reached."

(*Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 343)

This spirit of renunciation as enunciated in all the three master treatises—the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*—has been the main theme around which all the religious movements in India flourished. They attracted millions of devotees. Many of the affluent nations, men of million dollars too left their wealth and took to the Indian path of renunciation to get real bliss. The *Krishna* cult popularised by the *Hare Krishna Movement* is special point to note. Some scholars have a tendency to say that "The *Vedic* age was not generally the age of deep and critical thinking, but one of religious and vigorous living in the midst of the Nature, personified as gods and asked for cattle, crops, wealth, prosperity health, longevity, progeny, victory, peace and happiness here and heaven after death." This was not a correct interpretation. An authentic version of *Indian Gazeteer* (Vol. II, p. 162, should have devoted more attention to the interpretation of the *Vedas*. These prayers for different material gains are of course

there in the *Sri Chandi* not in the *Veda*. There the earnest aspiration is to have peace and knowledge of the *Self*, the *Infinite*, the *Brahman*. "The ultimate being (*sat*) is one. The learned call it by various names *Agni*, *Yama* and *Matarisvan*". This was not a popular version.

The *Nasadiya* hymn in the *Vedas* clearly observed : "He from whom this creation arose, whether he made it or did not make it the highest seer in the highest heaven, he forsooth knows, or does even he not know."

It may be true that the *Vedas* were mystic ideas. But one must not forget the authors. They were great mystics themselves. Their ultimate goal was God realisation. They meditated in the forests and whatever has come down to us was entirely from those learnt by them by hearing. No written record was available.

The Upanishadic thoughts were not so difficult or beyond understanding of the common men. "There was speculation about the nature of the ultimate reality, the process of creation, the nature of self and its relation with the ultimate reality, Highest value of life and the right way of living."

A very significant thing about this system was that "recorded discussions on these similar topics came to be called as *Upanishads*, which became a favourite word for all deep and speculative writings.

The sum and substance of the major *Upanishads*, *Isa*, *Katha*, *Kena*, *Prasna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitariya*, *Chandogya* and *Brihdaranyaka* as recognised and (given commentaries) explained by Shankara Bhagawan may be discussed in brief before venturing any comments or opinions on them :

1. *Atman* or self is the ultimate unitary and end enduring in the individual "pervades and transcends" the waking, dreaming and deeply sleeping experiences of man. The highest spiritual achievement is *Sachchidanandu Brahma*, the consciousness and the Supreme bliss of mind.

2. From the concept of Self, comes the next stage of conceiving or realising the ultimate Reality that is known as the *Brahman*. "It is from *Brahman* that the entire world originates ; it is in *Brahman* that it exists ; and it is in *Brahman*, that it merges. *Brahman* is real, infinite and blissful consciousness."

It also records the realisation of the sages who have mentioned that "The multiplicity of the world objects sprang from it as sparks from fire." The world comes out of it and goes back to it. It can only be negatively described as *not this, not this. Neti, Neti.*

3. The third important point, common throughout these *Upanishads* is the complete identity of the *Brahman* with the universe. *Sachchidananda Brahmohang*, I am the great *Brahman* or *Ahang Brahmasmi* : meaning the identity of the Self with the great *Brahman*.
4. Fourthly, everything manifests the *Brahman*. He is the all pervading creator of the universe. So he is present in everything. There is no plurality *neha nanasti kinchana*.
5. Fifthly, the absence of this knowledge of the *Brahman* in everything, particularly in the Self or the Individual which is due to ignorance is the root cause of all human suffering.
6. To realise *Atman*, one has to give up all desires for worldly and finite objects, purify one's intellect, live a righteous life, long for the *Atman* and hear read, think and meditate on the nature of the *Atman* and pray for the grace of the *Atman* to reveal itself.
7. And finally, once that identity with the *Brahman* is realised by an individual gets limitless ecstasy, unbounded joy. He becomes "freed from all suffering, bonds, responsibilities, births and deaths. He lives in amity with all fellow beings feeling the presence of the same *Atman* in all. After the death of the physical body he enters *Brahman* and enjoys the bliss inherent

In the mainstream of Indian philosophy and religion, next to the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* comes the most popular treatise—the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. The *Gita* precedes the epic Mahabharata war. In the *Gita*, the greatest emphasis, like the previous two treatises is on renunciation. “The ordinary human life is characterised by ignorance, suffering, bondage to the Law of Karma and repeated births and deaths. All human sufferings, bondage, births and rebirths can be avoided by totally achieving a state of desirelessness. At this stage a man’s intellect gets balanced. He is *Sthitaprajna*. He becomes *Brahmabhuta*.”

Like the previous two great treatises, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* also reveals the great truth: *Brahman* pervades everything. “The possibility of an ideal state which can be realised by man, in which there is no suffering no bondage, no experience of births and deaths, and in which utmost peace, unending joy and unbounded freedom are experienced.” This state of mind is *Brahmishthiti* or a state akin to that of the *Brahman*.

The *Gita* describes “extensively” the *Brahman*. The *Brahman* is the ultimate goal. The *Brahman* is the maintainer or support *Bharta*, the overlord (*Prabhu*), the witness (*Saksin*) the resting place (*Nivasa*) the Refuge (*Sarana*), the Friend (*Suhrid*) the Origin (*Prabhava*), Destruction (*Pralaya*), the Stay or Existence (*Sthana*), the Repository (*Nidhan*) and the Imperishable Seed (*Abhyaya Bija*).

Swami Ramatirtha the great *Vedantist* who could be described as a *Second Swami Vivekananda*—preached and practised the essence of the *Upanishadic* teachings. He realised the divine light. Throughout his life he addressed hundreds and thousands of gatherings and kept his audiences both in India and abroad spell bound by his great oratory skill on the teachings of the *Upanishads*. He visited a number of countries to spread the message of immortality. He even went to Japan, where a second Parliament of Religion was to be organised. With great hardships, when he reached Japan almost miraculously, he was disappointed to learn that the Parliament of

Religion Session was postponed ! However, the Ramatirtha Mission, like the Ramakrishna Mission compiled and published the great Saint's thought-provoking discourses on the *Upanishads*. The Saint gave scientific interpretation of the word *Om* which, according to him, is the main mono syllable by uttering which one may achieve God realisation. That has been the main teaching of all the *Upanishads*. The saint had translated that teaching and preaching into practice.

In brief, the *Upanishads* are the basic foundations of Hindu philosophy. They form the quintessence of earlier *Vedic* literature and later of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*.

The *Upanishads* have played a significant role in the God-realisation experiments by the earlier and present sages. They may be described as the beacon light in the world of darkness of ignorance, both spiritually and literally. Even as literary pieces they are simply superb, rich with sublime thoughts.

It will be wrong to surmise that the *Upanishads* are meant for Hindus only. In fact many great scholars of other faiths have also accepted the substance of the *Upanishads* as the guiding principles of their daily lives. Max Mueller, Schopenhauer the great philosopher, Huxley, Christopher Isherwood are a few notable names to mention.

The deep philosophy of the *Upanishads* attracted the searching mind of the philosopher Prince Dara Shuko who was among the first to conduct an experiment on comparative religion. Juan Mascaro noted, "When Prince Dara Shuko, the son of the Emperor Shah Jahan who built the Taj Mahal, was in Kashmir in 1640, he heard about the *Upanishads* and he had fifty of them translated into Persian. This translation was finished in 1657, and it was much later put into Latin by Anquetil Duperron and published in Paris in 1802. This was read by Schopenhauer, who said of the *Upanishad* their reading has been consolation of my life, and will be of my death."

(Mascaro Juan : *The Upanishads*, p. 8)

The deep imprint of the philosophy of the *Upanishads* is reflected in all Indian literary works. Many poets in India and abroad made the *Upanishad* the guiding star of their lives.

Tagore was deeply influenced by *Upanishadic* ideas. His father, a learned scholar and a spiritual leader of modern India, knew the *Upanishads* very well. He himself imparted that knowledge to the young poet.

Dara Shuko was so much attracted by the deep thoughts of the *Upanishads* that he appointed one hundred and fifty *Pandits* from Varanasi who worked constantly for ten months. They had their camp erected on the bank of the holy river Yamuna near Kashmiri Gate. They compiled fifty including the main ten *Upanishads* and brought it out under the title *Sar-i-Asrar*. The details are given by Dr. Kalika Ranjan Kanungo in his doctoral thesis on *Dara Shuko*.

The *Upanishads* are impersonal. They are universal. To quote Swami Ranganathananda, "They do not give man a set of finished and final dogmas or creeds which he is just to swallow ; they ask man to discover spiritual truths for himself, to experience spiritual truths. And the greatest truth that they discovered, and asked humanity to rediscover for itself, is the ever present purity and divinity of man. Our senses reveal man as weak, ignorant, and limited, and subject to birth and death. But they discovered, through a penetrating investigation, the eternal, immortal ever free dimension of man, the *Atman*. This discovery was not the result of any intellectual speculation, but of *anubhava*, experience—*Vedāhametang purusam mahantam*. When one sage discovered this truth and announced it, other sages took it up and reverified it in their own experience, just as it is done today in the physical sciences with truths about the external world."

(Swami Ranganathananda : *Eternal Values for Changing World*, p. 131)

Swami Ranganathananda felt, "the *Upanishads* or *Vedānta* represent the highest development of Indian spiritual thought." Among the sages and seers who contributed to the formulation of the great ancient philosophical mysticism not only men, there were women scholars like Maitreyi, Gargi and sages like Yagnavalka, Sanat Kumara, Varuna, philosopher king Janaka. Even children of the purest quality like Nachiketa, Satyakama,

Svetaketu, had shown equal earnestness for exploring the truth. Swami Ranganathananda noted, "The *Upanishads* were not interested to frame a creed or propound a dogma. They sought and sought with a persistence rare in the history of philosophic thought, for that changeless reality in the changing facets of man and nature and discovered the one in the many the *Brahman* or the *Atman*, the unity of the self in man with the self in the universe, the one without a second—*Ekameva Advitiam*."

This has been truly described as a "Mount Everest of Experience. The *Rishis* declared finally this experience (of the *Upanishads*) as the goal of human existence, the birthright of every being, and the path to it lies through the steady pursuit of Truth, right effort, right knowledge and *Brahmacharya* or self control."

Swami Ranganathananda in his *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* noted, "This spiritual motivation of our nation's culture is derived from the glorious philosophical and spiritual contributions of our immortal *Upanishad* of over four thousand years ago ; and that forms a fascinating chapter of not only our national history, but of human history as well."

(Swami Ranganathananda : *Eternal Values for A Changing Society*, p. 130)

It is from the *Mundaka Upanishad* that our nation derived the motto inscribed on the crest of Asoka's lion *Satyameva Jayate—Truth alone triumphs*.

The unique role of the *Upanishads* in Indian philosophy has been like a long river flowing down from the mountain top to the valleys covering the entire country. Professor S.N. Das Gupta who taught Indian philosophy at the Cambridge University, described this running and continuing flow through three treatises which in fact formed part of the same epic. Describing the Philosophy of Ancient India, Prof. Das Gupta observed, "The contribution of the first period is to be found in the philosophical hymns of the *Vedas*, in the more mature *Upanishads*, in the *Gita* which is something like a

metrical commentary on the *Upanishads*, working out their ideals in their practical bearing to life." Prof. Das Gupta further observed, "It (*Gita*) also accepts the final instruction of the *Upanishads* regarding the nature of the self as the ultimate reality, and the means of the highest moral perfection as leading to it. But at the same time it enjoins on all persons that the moral and social duties should be strictly followed."

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The Puranas as Analysed by Alberuni

No single scholar, even in India, has so minutely, meticulously and painstakingly taken pains and shown perseverance to analyse all the eighteen Indian Scriptures—the eighteen *Puranas* as the great scholar traveller Alberuni. Not only that he had made a study in depth, of all these great master-pieces, Alberuni took the trouble of comparing their inner substances with other contemporary philosopher's ideas especially from Greece, Rome and Egypt representing the most ancient civilisations of the world.

One is simply amazed at the great learning of this simple individual. He was equally well versed in all these philosophies and compared—they so effortlessly and with ease as if they were all on his finger tips. Alberuni had been most fascinated by the *Puranas*. He did not talk much about the earlier philosophies as depicted in the *Vedas* and *Puranas* mainly perhaps due to the difficulties he had about their interpretations from original texts. His mother tongue being Arabic—and he was vastly learned in Greek and other languages he had regularly been dictating to literary assistants—he has mentioned about this dictation in his *Alberuni's India* more than once.

One is obviously much influenced by the scholars around him. It would seem the scholars who helped him in his

marathon studies were mostly *Vaishnavas*. This would be clear from the facts incorporated in the detailed studies of the scholar on *Narayana*, *Vasudeva* and the weakness as reflected particularly in his appreciation of the *Vishnu Puran*.

Alberuni devoted much of his precious time in the study of mathematical geography, astronomy, astrology, the religious philosophy of the great country which he visited with the adventurer Mohammed Ghazni. Ghazni left the country, not Alberuni. He played the role of the prime adviser to the ruler of his land. He obviously had no financial lust or political ambition. He would have got the highest place in every royal court both in his own land and in India. He was a real scholar. He preferred collecting pebbles on the great shore of Indian Ocean of Knowledge.

Alberuni's treatise in volumes provide main sources of information on Indian Philosophy prevalent in the eleventh century. No student of higher philosophy can proceed, specially on the eighteen *Puranas*, without a reference to Alberuni's studies. His comparison, specially with Greek philosophers, is simply superb. Some modern scholars may set aside some of the ideas of *Puranas* as simply absurd. Their exaggerations are really so misleading that it leaves the reader in great flutter about their very foundation as philosophical theories. As an investigating scholar and learned philosopher it did not escape his mind. He noted their hyperbolas and at once as if it was his own faith and own philosophy. Alberuni strongly supported the thoughts as depicted in the *Puranas* by quoting immediately—similar thoughts from great authorities on similar subjects. He, in his wisdom can be compared only with Kautilya as a master of so many contemporary subjects, in his versatility and love for India he may be ranked only second to Professor Max Mueller. He was not an ordinary traveller.

In the great presentation of the lofty philosophy and mystic thoughts of Indian great sages and scholars, Alberuni, hailing from an altogether different faith, treated the entire subject as if an ardent Hindu sage himself. He of course was proud of his

Islamic faith and never forgot to have a dig at the Hindu system that any proud scholar would do. For instance while discussing the caste and class system, prevalent in India at that time which he saw himself, he proudly—and most justifiably opposed it, although, so subtly and mildly, proudly proclaimed about the equality of man and universal brotherhood of the great Islam. Still he never criticised it with any bitterness. Today, Alberuni perhaps would have been happy to see Islamic thoughts too flourishing and proudly forming—a constituent component in the mainstream of Indian philosophy, Islam was still a foreign faith to India at the time of his visit.

It would not be an ordinary tribute to the learning and marathon works of Alberuni, that the greatest authorities of Indian philosophy while tracing the sources of early history of Vaishnavism respectfully and gratefully refer to the monumental work of Alberuni. While discussing the early history of Vaisnavism. The *Cultural History of India* (Vol. IV, p. 127) noted, "In the *Visnudharmattara*, a work mentioned by Alberuni (A.D. 1030) and probably used by Brahmagupta (A.D. 628) there are rules for the construction of images by various divinities related to the *Bhagavata* Cult. These include the five *Vrisni* heroes".

Similarly while describing details of the spread of *Vaisnavism* by Alvars in the South, the same authentic treatise leaned on the source of Alberuni. The book recorded, "The activities of the Alvars, representing the emotional side Tamilian *Vaisnavism* and their successors, the *Acharyas* representing its intellectual side, must have given rise to the tradition recorded in the *Bhagavad Purana* (XI, 5, 38—40), a work referred to by Alberuni about A.D. 1030, that large numbers of the worshippers of *Vasudeva*—*Visnu* flourished in the *Dravida* or Tamil country in the *Kali* age when they were rare in India.

(*Ibid*, Page 143).

ALBERUNI (973 A.D.)—A BACKGROUND OF THE MAN

Abu Raihan Alberuni, a great scholar visited India during the eleventh century. According to Prof. A.L. Basham,

"Born in A.D. 973 Alberuni accompanied Sultan Mahmud of Ghazani to India, learnt Sanskrit and read the Hindu classics, the *Puranas* and the *Bhagavad Gita*" (Basham A.L.: *A Cultural History of India*, p 438) Alberuni has given the most authentic account of the contemporary religion, philosophy, literature, geography, chronology, astronomy, customs, laws and astrology of India. Prof. Basham also tells us "Alberuni was acquainted with astronomy, mathematics, chronology, mathematical geography, physics, chemistry and mineralogy".

His most authentic account of *Alberuni's India* has been edited brilliantly and painstakingly by Dr. Edward C. Sachau, Professor in the Royal University of Berlin and Principal of the Seminary for Oriental Languages. The account was in two volumes. It was first published more than a hundred years ago. In 1910 a new edition of both the volumes in one was made available. The learned Scholar translated *Alberuni's India*, both in English and German in 1888. It has been the most authentic treatise on India.

ON SRIMAD BHAGAVAD GITA

Both the great scholars, editor and author of the books were strongly attracted by Indian philosophy. The editor, while introducing Alberuni, commented "He seems to have revelled in the pure themes of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and it deserves to be noticed that he twice mentions the saying of (Maharshi) Vyasa 'Learn twenty five elements of existence by distinction and afterwards adhere to whatever religion you like and your end will be salvation'".

Alberuni even recorded the genius of Hindu Scholars as "enjoying the help of God," which to a Muslim meant as much as inspired by God, guided by divine inspiration.

No doubt, Alberuni was a devout Muslim and proudly mentioned about the democratic Islamic way of living as against the caste ridden Hindu society which was a real fact. At the same time, it must be ascribed to his credit that he was quite independent in his thoughts about religion and philosophy. "He is a friend of clear, determined, and manly words. He abhors half-truths, veiled words and wavering

action. Everywhere he came forward as a champion of his conviction with the courage of a man."

This was true even of his discussion on politics.

TWENTY BOOKS ON INDIA

Alberuni, besides his travel account, wrote twenty books on India, "both translations and original compositions, and a number of tales and legends, mostly derived from the ancient love of Iran and India. As probably most valuable contributions to the historic literature of the time, he must mention his history of his native country Khwarizm and the history of the famous sect of the Karmatians, the loss of both of which is much to be deplored."

If one compares Alberuni's works with the previous travellers he would realize easily how this learned traveller worked most systematically. It is a matter to specially mention that "his description of Hindu philosophy was probably unparalleled. His system of chronology and astronomy was more complete and accurate than had ever been given. His communications from the *Puranas* were probably entirely new to his readers, as also the important chapters on literature, manners, festivals, actual geography, and much quoted chapter on historic chronology."

SANSKRIT SOURCES

Alberuni extensively quoted from Sanskrit texts. For instance while dealing with a theology and philosophy he referred to the original works like *Sankhya* by Kapila, or treatise by Patanjali, *Gita* (*Srimad Bhagavad Gita*). Alberuni referred the original texts like *Vishnu Dharma*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Matsya Purana*, *Vayu Purana*, *Aditya Purana*.

For other important topics like astronomy, chronology, geography, and astrology he referred to *Pulisa Siddhanta*, *Brahma Siddhanta*, *Khanda Khadyaka*, *Uttara Khandaka Khadyaka* by Brahmagupta; commentary of the *Khandaka Khadyaka* by Balabhadra; *Brihat Samhitha*, *Pancha Siddhantika*, *Brihat Jatakam*, *Laghu Jatakam* by Varahamihira (of Vikrama-

ditya's *Navaratna* fame); commentary of the *Brihat Samhita*, *Sarvadhara* by *Utpala* from Kashmir; a book by *Aryabhatta*; *Karanasara* by *Vittesvara*; *Karanatilaka* by *Vijayanandin*; *Sripala*; Book of the *Rishi Bhuvanakosa*, Book of the *Brahman Bhattila*; Book of *Dulabha*, *Book of Jivasarman*; Book of *Samaya*. Alberuni specially referred to works of *Charaka* while writing on medicine. Alberuni did not speak much of the great Indian epics the *Ramayana*, or *Mahabharata* but quoted extensively from *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. He even quoted *Manu's Dharma Sastra*. His most illuminating description was the chapter on Indian literature where he mentioned details of innumerable important books. He mentioned at least two individual names who might have been working as his literary assistants. They were *Somenath* and *Kanoj*.

Alberuni was conscious of the differences in the thought system of the Hindus and the Muslims. But Alberuni compares the Indian system with Greek philosophy, chiefly of *Plato* and "tries to illustrate Hindu actions by those of the Greeks and thereby to bring them nearer to the understanding of his readers".

COMPARATIVE STUDY

Alberuni had a good collection of books both on India and Greece. "The role which Greek literature played in Alberuni's work in the distant country of the *Paktyes* and *Gandhari* is a singular fact in the history of civilisation. *Plato* before the doors of India, perhaps in India itself. A considerable portion of then extant Greek literature had found its way into the library of Alberuni, who used it in the most conscientious and appreciative way, and took from it choicest passages to confront Greek thought with Indian."

So Alberuni was among the first learned scholar to have a comparative study of the two great ancient civilisations of the world. He was not a mere traveller as normally described. He was much more than that. Indian culture, Indian literature and aspects and facets of Indian specialised branches of knowledge like medicine, astronomy, have perhaps for the first

time, been reflected so appreciatively and with reverence by an individual who was much above any boundaries of four walls of a country or who was much above the limitations of any faith known as religion. He was a real seeker of Truth and knowledge.

In this respect he may be ranked as a forerunner to only Prof. Max Mueller who opened the gateway of Indian store of knowledge before the whole world.

Alberuni referred mainly to the *Vishnu Cult*, much less the *Saiva*. That might be due to the source of information. He had perhaps easier access to the *Vaishnava* literature than *Saiva*, "*Vishnu* or *Narayana* is the first God in the pantheon of his Hindu informants and literary authorities while *Siva* is only incidentally mentioned, and that too not always in a favourable manner. This indicates a remarkable change in the religious history of those countries. For the predecessor of Mahmud in the rule over Kabulistan and the Punjab, the Pala dynasty were worshippers of *Siva*, as we may judge from their coins, adorned with the image of Nanda, the Ox of *Siva* and from the etymology of their names. The image of Nanda reappears a second time on the coins of the descendants of King Mahmud on the throne of Ghazna."

DESCRIPTION OF PREVALENT CULTURE

Alberuni started his description of prevalent culture in contemporary India with the hurdles one faced to take up the problem. First was the basic differences between the Hindu and Muslim way of thinking and described "the barriers which separate the Hindus from the Muslims and make it so particularly difficult for a Muslim to study any Indian Subject." His main difficulty was, obviously, the difference of the language and its particular nature. He compared Arabic with Sanskrit.

The most spectacular aspect of the presentation of Alberuni was that inspite of all such hurdles like language, expression, lack of real teachers he did not give up the efforts to study in depth the secret of Indian Philosophy and he did it with a spirit of deepest appreciation. His approach was not merely

that of a spectator but that of a real student of comparative religion and literature.

ON VASUDEVA

For instance when Alberuni talked of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and described the story of *Sri Krishna* (whom he all through described as *Vasudeva*) nobody could even suspect that the author was not an Indian scholar. He started the chapter (quite late in the book) *On Vasudeva and the wars of the Bharata* quite philosophically. He wrote "The life of the world depends upon sowing and procreating. Both processes increase in the course of time and this increase is unlimited, whilst the world is limited." It was quite a long but most respectful introduction on the appearances of *Vasudeva*. "A messenger of this kind (who came as a saviour of humankind) is, according to the belief of the Hindus, *Vasudeva*, who was sent the last time in human shape, being called *Vasudeva*. It was a time when the giants were numerous on earth and the earth was full of their oppression; it tottered, being hardly able to bear the whole number of them, and it trembled from the vehemence of their treading. Then there was born a child in the city of Mathura, *Vasudeva* by the sister of Kamsa, at that time the ruler of the town."

Giving the background of the family which Alberuni not only made faithfully but interesting, he wrote "They were a *Jatt* family, cattle owners." He did not forget to mention about the intuitive inner voice of Kamsa, the ruler during the wedding of his sister that he would perish at the hands of her child. So the appointed people who were to bring him every child of hers as soon as she gave birth to it, and he killed all her children, both male and female. Finally, she gave birth to Balabhadra and Yasoda, the wife of the herdsman Nanda took the child to herself and managed to keep it concealed from the spies of Kamsa. There upon she became pregnant at the eighth time, and gave birth to *Vasudeva* in a rainy night of the eighth day of the black half of the month of Bhadrapada, whilst the moon was ascending in the station *Rohini*. As the guards had fallen into deep sleep and

neglected the watch, the father stole the child and brought it to *Nandakula*, i.e. the stable of the cows of Nanda, the husband of Yasoda, near Mathura but separated from this place by the river Yamuna. Vasudeva exchanged the child for a daughter of Nanda, which happened to be born at the moment when Vasudeva arrived with the boy. He brought this female child to the guards instead of his son, Kamsa, the ruler wanted to kill the child, but she flew up into the air and disappeared."

This was the detailed description of a traveller who came from a long and distant land and who had to learn the language with great difficulties a thousand years ago. He was not only a foreigner, a traveller who had belonged to an altogether different faith--Islam. But such men of letters belong to the whole world. They are part of human civilisation which is universal. Who among us in modern India, and among even Orthodox Hindus proud of their heritage can tell today that *Sri Krishna* had "a special name in each month"?

We may learn it from Alberuni, to refresh our own cultural history. Alberuni had given in a tabular form and mentioned clearly that "His (*Sri Krishna's*) followers begin the months with *Margasirsha* and each month they begin with the eleventh day, because on this day *Vasudeva*, appeared. What were the names? According to Alberuni they were :

| The months | Name of Vasudeva | The months | Name of Vasudeva |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <i>Margasirsha</i> | Keshava | <i>Jyaishtha</i> | Trivikrama |
| <i>Pausha</i> | Narayana | <i>Ashadha</i> | Vamana |
| <i>Magha</i> | Madhava | <i>Sravana</i> | Sridhara |
| <i>Phalguna</i> | Govinda | <i>Biśadrapada</i> | Hrishikesh |
| <i>Chaitra</i> | Vishnu | <i>Asvayuja</i> | Padmanabha |
| <i>Vaishakha</i> | Madhusudana | <i>Kartika</i> | Damodara |

Then he has given the whole story of *Mahabharata*.

ON INDIAN ERAS

A very important point touched by Alberuni has been a summary of the description of the eras. He wrote, "The eras serve to fix certain moments of time which are mentioned in some historical or astronomical connection. The Hindus do not consider it wearisome to reckon with huge numbers but rather enjoy it.

Alberuni could tell us about our eras, which we ourselves have not cared to know !

The eras mentioned by him were :

1. The beginning of the existence of *Brahman*
2. Beginning of the day of the present *nychthemeron* of *Brahman*, i.e. the beginning of the *Kalpa*
3. The beginning of the seventh *manvantara*, in which we are now
4. The beginning of the twenty eighth *Chaturyuga* in which we are now
5. The beginning of the fourth *Yuga* of the present *Chatuyuga*, called *Kalikala*, i.e. the time of *Kali*. The whole *yuga* is called after him, though accurately speaking, his time falls only in the last part of the *yuga*. Notwithstanding, the Hindus mean by *Kalikala*, the beginning of the *Kaliyuga*
6. *Pandava Kala* i.e. the time of the life and the wars of Bharata.

Then he traced later developments when the following eras replaced the earlier ones. They were eras of—

1. Sri Harsha
2. Vikramaditya
3. Saka
4. Vallabha
5. Gupta

Alberuni has recorded "The Hindus believe regarding Sri Harsha that he used to examine the soil in order to see what

of hidden treasures was in its interior, as far down as the seventh earth; that in fact, he found such treasures; and that in consequence, he could disperse with oppressing his subjects (by taxes). His era is used in Mathura and the country of Kanauj. Between Sri Harsha and Vikramaditya there is an interval of 400 years."

Alberuni has narrated about the time of Rama as he was informed a thousand years ago. Quoting *Vishnu Dharma* Alberuni noted, "Markandeya says, in answer to a question of Vajra; I have already lived as long as 6 *Kalpas* and 6 *manvantaras* of the seventh *Kalpa*, 23 *tretayugas* of the seventh *manvantara*. In the twenty fourth *tretayugas* Rama killed Ravana and Lakshmana the brother of Rama killed Kumbhakarna, the brother of Ravana. The two subjugated all the *Rakshasas*. At that time, Valmiki, the *Rishi* composed the story of Rama and *Ramayana* and eternalised it in his books. It was I who told it to Yudhisthira, the son of Pandu, in the forest of Kamyakavana."

The author of *Vishnu Dharma* reckoned here with *Tretayuga*.

ON INDIAN SYSTEM OF MATHEMATICS

He gives details of arithmetical numeration which were known throughout the world. Alberuni mentions the eighteen orders of numeration which are :

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. <i>Kkam</i> | 10. <i>Padma</i> |
| 2. <i>Dasam</i> | 11. <i>Kharya</i> |
| 3. <i>Satam</i> | 12. <i>Nikharya</i> |
| 4. <i>Sahasram</i> | 13. <i>Mahapadma</i> |
| 5. <i>Ayut</i> | 14. <i>Sanku</i> |
| 6. <i>Laksha</i> | 15. <i>Samudra</i> |
| 7. <i>Prayut</i> | 16. <i>Madhya</i> |
| 8. <i>Koti</i> | 17. <i>Antya</i> |
| 9. <i>Nyarbuda</i> | 18. <i>Parardha</i> |

In at least sixteen pages, Alberuni devoted a detailed study of the system of mathematics, as in vogue in India during his

visit. He did not forget to mention even some differences among the contemporary *scholars*.

In the chapter on astronomy he has given all the names of the planets, the signs of the Zodiac, the lunar stations and all other related subjects.

ON FLORA AND FAUNA

One of the most fascinating chapters in Alberuni's book has been on the various notes on the country, their rivers, the oceans, itineries and distances between their several kingdoms and between the boundaries of their country. He started with a description of India. He did not mention the name of the mountain Himalayas but noted, "The inhabitable world does not reach the north on account of the cold, except in certain places where it penetrates into the north in the shape, as it were, of tongues and bays."

About the Southern boundary Alberuni wrote, "In the South it reaches as far as the coast of the ocean, which in west and east is connected with comprehending ocean. This Southern ocean is navigable. It does not form the utmost Southern limit of the inhabitable world. On the contrary, the latter stretches still more southward in the shape of large and small islands which fill the ocean. In this southern region land and water dispute with each other their position. So that at one place the continent protrudes into the sea, whilst in another the sea penetrates deeply into the continent."

India's boundary has been described in Alberuni's original book on p. 97, "India is limited in the South by the Indian Ocean and on all the three other sides by the lofty mountains, the waters of which flow down to it. But if you have seen the soil of India with your own eyes and meditate on its nature—if you consider the rounded stones found in the earth however deeply you dig, stones that are huge near the mountains are where the rivers have a violent current; stones that are of smaller size at greater distance from the mountains and where the mountains flow more slowly stones that appear pulverised in the shape of sand where the streams begin

to stagnate near their mouths and near the sea if you consider all this, you could scarcely help thinking that India has once been a sea which by degrees has been built up by the alluvium of the streams.

ON SOME IMPORTANT CITIES

Today's Madhya Pradesh has been described in details by Alberuni. He wrote, "The middle of India is the country round Kanauj, which they call *Madhyadesa* that is, the middle of the realm. It is the middle or centre from a geographical point of view, in so far as it lies half way between the sea and the mountains, in the midst between the hot and cold provinces, and also between eastern and western frontiers of India. But it is a political centre too because in former times, it was the residence of their most famous heroes and kings.

He was fascinated by the town Kanauj to the West of the Ganges "a very large town, but felt sad that "most of it is now in ruins and desolate since the capital has been transferred there to the city of Bari, east of the Ganges. Between the two towns there is a distance of three to four days marches."

About the pilgrimages Alberuni has made special mention "As Kanauj (Kanyakubja) has become famous by the children of Pandu, the city of Mathura (which he describe as *Mahura*) has become famous by Vasudeva. It lies east of the river *Jaun* (*Yamuna*). The distance between *Mahura* and *Kanauj* is 28 *farsakh*."

He has mentioned about *Taneshar* (Sthaneswar) which lies between the two rivers to the north both of *Kanauj* and *Mahura*, at a distance of nearly 80 *farsakha* from *Kanauj* and nearly 50 *farsakh* from *Mahura*.

ON RIVERS AND RAINS

He has described in detail about Ganga which "rises in the mountains". Alberuni even knew that, "Its source is called *Gangadvara*". He also mentioned, "Most of the other rivers of the country also rise in the same mountain".

Then he explained Hindu method of determining distances. He has described in detail the different connecting routes among the major important cities along with their distances.

Alberuni has really been fantastic. He has given description of the rainy season—*Varsakala*. "These rains are the more copious and last the longer the more northward the situation of a province of India is, and the less it is intersected by ranges of mountains."

ON INDIAN CALENDAR

Giving details about the Indian names of the week, days Alberuni tells us how they have been derived from their connecting planets. That is why *Adityabara* (Sunday) *Aditya* means *Rabi* or the sun. The other names were also accordingly arranged according to the planets. *Soma bara* (Monday), *Mangala bara* (Tuesday), *Budh bara* (Wednesday), *Brihaspati bara* (Thursday), *Sukra bara* (Friday) and *Sanaischara bara* (Saturday).

Then he gave fuller details of the planets and their names in Indian languages as for instance Sun is known in different Indian names like *Aditya*, *Surya*, *Bhanu*, *Arka*, *Divakara*, *Ravi* etc.

Similarly he has described the Indian months which are most thought provoking and informative. Most of the Indians of today may be quite ignorant about them.

ON THE BRAHMANDA—THE UNIVERSE : ITS ORIGIN

Alberuni tells us most interestingly on the *Brahmanda*, the Universe. He noted "The theory of the Hindus, that the water existed before all creation, rests on this, that it is the cause of the cohesion of the atoms of everything, and of the duration of life in every animated being. Thus the water is an instrument in the hands of the creator when he wants to create something out of matter."

The learned scholar compared with a similar idea mentioned in the Holy *Quran* which says, "And his (God's) throne

was on the water. He extensively quoted great authorities like Plato and presented their view points too. Alberuni said, Plato tells us in his *Timoes* something like the *Brahmanda* : "The creator cut a straight thread into halves. With each of them he described a circle, so that the two circles met in two places and one of them he divided into seven parts". By this he hinted at the original two motions of the Universe (From East To West in the diurnal rotation and from west to east in the precession of the equinoxes), and at the globes of the planets.

He compared the Indian theory with those of great authorities like Aristotle, Ptolemy, Johannes and finally accepted the Indian view point. "Balabhadra gives us the impression of holding the same opinion as those who think that heaven or the heavens are a compact body holding in equilibrium all heavy bodies and carrying them, and that it is above the spheres. To Balabhadra it is just as easy to prefer tradition to eyesight, as it is difficult to us to prefer doubt to a clear proof."

Alberuni, himself a great scholar in astronomy paid the highest tribute to the Indian Scientist Aryabhata. "The truth is entirely with the followers of Aryabhata who gives us the impression of really being men of great scientific attainments. It is perfectly evident that *Brahmanda* means the Universe together with all products of creation in it."

His description of earth and heaven according to the religious views of the Hindus based upon their traditional literature was amply a proof of his vast knowledge and command over Indian Philosophy and religion. Indians think that "the earths are seven, like seven covers one above the other, and the upper one they divide into seven parts, differing from our astronomers."

ON THE SEVEN HEAVENS

On the seven heavens Alberuni noted, according to the Hindu Philosophy, "after the earths follow the heavens, consisting of seven stories, one above the other. They are

called *Loka*, which means gathering place. In a similar manner also the Greeks considered the heavens as gathering places. So Johannes Grammaticus said in his refutation of Proclus : "Some philosophers thought that the sphere called milk, by which they mean the milky way, is a dwelling place for rational souls". He quoted poet Homer, who said, "Thou hast made the pure heaven an eternal dwelling place for the Gods. The winds do not shake it, the rains do not wet it, and the snow does not destroy it. For in it there is resplendent clearness without any covering cloud."

On the same subject Alberuni quoted Plato who said God spoke to the seven planets : You are the Gods of the gods, and I am the father of the actions ; I am he who made you so that no dissolution is possible; for anything bound, though capable of being loosened, is not exposed to destruction, as long its order is good."

Alberuni then quoted Aristotle who said, in his letter to Alexander : "The world is the order of the whole creation. That which is above the world, and surrounds it on the sides, is the dwelling place of the gods. Heaven is full of Gods to which we give the name of stars". In another place of the same book Aristotle noted, "The earth is bounded by the water, the water by the air, the air by the fire."

The highest place, according to all these great minds of the world have the dwelling place of the Gods and the lowest the home of the aquatic animals. Alberuni happily observed that all such ideas were also expressed in the *Vayu Purana* to this effect that "the earth is held in its grasp by the water, the water by the pure fire, the fire by the wind, the wind by heaven and the heaven by its lord."

The names of the seven *lokas* or stages of heaven did not differ with the other scholars and the learned traveller mentioned their names :

| The number of the Heavens | What members of the Sun they represent according to <i>Aditya Purana</i> | Their names according to the <i>Aditya, Vayu</i> and <i>Vishnu Puran.</i> |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| I | The Stomach | <i>Bhurloka</i> |
| II | The Breast | <i>Bhuwarloka</i> |
| III | The Mouth | <i>Svarloka</i> |
| IV | The Eyebrow | <i>Maharloka</i> |
| V | The Forehead | <i>Jnanaloka</i> |
| VI | Above the Forehead | <i>Tapoloka</i> |
| VII | The Skull | <i>SatyaloKa</i> |

ON IDOL WORSHIP

Alberuni has given a detailed account about the beginning of Idol Worship and a vivid description of the individual idols. Alberuni explained how a visual presentation became quickly receptive to a popular mind. "And as common people will only acquiesce in pictorial representations many of the leaders of religious communities have so far deviated from the right path as to give such imagery in their books and houses of worship, like the Jews and Christians, and more than all, the Manichacans."

Conveying his own feeling on the subject, Alberuni observed, "These words of mine would at once receive a sufficient illustration, if for example, a picture of the Prophet were made, or of Mekka and Kaba, and were shown to uneducated men or women. Their joy in looking at the thing would bring them to kiss the picture, to rub their cheeks against it, and to roll themselves in the dust before it, as if they were seeing not the picture but the original, and were in this way, as if they were present in the holy places, performing the rites of pilgrimage, the great and the small ones."

Alberuni said this was the background or the real "cause which leads to the manufacture of idols, monuments in honour of much venerated persons, prophets, sages, angels, destined to keep alive their memory when they are absent or dead to create for them a lasting place of grateful veneration in the hearts of men when they die." On page 54 of his book he clearly noted, "Some people even pretend to know that all mankind, before God sent them his prophets, were one large idolatrous body."

Talking about idolatry in India he narrated in detail the story of King Ambarisha and Indra, how the latter was to be worshipped by the royal devotee who renounced everything in search of Truth and Divinity.

Alberuni visited himself many of the important idols and has given their descriptions. He mentioned the idol of Multan called *Aditya* (The Sun), the idol of Thaneswar called *Chakrasvamin* (The owner of *Chakra* which was of bronze and nearly the size of a man; then he mentioned about the wooden idol called *Sarada* "which is much venerated and frequented by pilgrims in the mountains of Bolor in Kashmir." Alberuni then gives detailed quotations from the *Samhita* of Varahamihira of Vikramaditya's court. This relates to the construction of idols, their sizes and other details.

Indian leaders and historians, even today recall the contribution of Alberuni in the Cultural History of India. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his *Discovery of India*, recorded "The famous traveller and scholar Alberuni, a Persian born in Khorasan in Central Asia, came to India in the Eleventh century A.D. He had already studied Greek philosophy which was popular in the early days of Islam in Baghdad. In India he took the trouble to learn Sanskrit in order to study Indian philosophy. He was struck by many common features and he has compared the two in his book on India. He referred to Sanskrit books dealing with Greek astronomy and Roman astronomy."

(Nehru, Jawaharlal : *Discovery of India*, p. 160)

ON NARAYANA

Alberuni discussed at length on the most sacred idol *Narayana*, his appearance at different time and his names. He wrote, "*Narayana* is, according to the Hindus, a supernatural power, which does not on principle try to bring about the good by the good, nor the bad by the bad, but to prevent the evil and destruction by whatever means happens to be available. For this force the good exists prior to the bad, but if the good does not probably develop nor is available, it uses the bad, this being unavoidable." Alberuni's study and analysis of the *Vishnu Puran* has been fantastic. Quoting the book *Vishnu Dharma*, Alberuni wrote: this book says, "The names of *Hari*, i.e. *Narayana* differ in the *yugas*. They are the following: *Vasudeva*, *Sankarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*."

Alberuni with all the authority he commanded comments, "I suppose that the author has not here preserved the proper sequences, for *Vasudeva* belonged to the end of the four *Yugas*"! This clearly showed how deeply the traveller scholar had studied the ancient Indian scriptures. In his judgment he was precise and correct.

ON FESTIVALS

May be Alberuni did not have full opportunities to witness all the national festivals of India otherwise he would have not written "most of the Hindu festivals, are celebrated by women and children only."

In fact the Indian festivals are well connected with harvesting and the arrival of freshness of autumn and spring.

Alberuni had listed the Indian festivals month-wise. He has given special features of the festivals of Kashmir. He noted and witnessed festival of women on the full moon's day of the month of *Phalguna*. On the following night, i.e. on 16th of *Phalguna* they celebrate *Sivaratri* where "they worship *Mahadeva* during the whole night ; they remain awake and do not lie down to sleep, and offer to him perfumes and flowers."

Alberuni liked the festival in Multan, perhaps next to that of Kashmir. Alberuni described a festival in Multan. "The

Hindus of Mutan have a festival which is called *Sambapura-yatra*; they celebrate it in honour of the Sun, and worship him."

More interesting than the descriptions of the festivals has become the list of detailed auspicious days. A special chapter has been devoted to the days which were held in special veneration on lucky and unlucky times and on such lines as were particularly favourable for acquiring in them bliss in heaven. "The single day enjoy different degrees of veneration according to certain qualities which they attribute to them. They distinguish e.g. the Sunday, because it is the day of the Sun and the beginning of the week as the Friday is distinguished in Islam."

Alberuni clearly described special significance to the Hindus of *Amavasya* and *Purnima*. On p. 291 Alberuni noted, "In accordance with the belief of the Hindus regarding this increase and wane (of Moon) the Brahmins sacrifice continually to the fire in order to earn heavenly reward."

Alberuni distinguished four other days which were venerated, because "according to the Hindus, with then the single *yugas* of the present *Chaturyuga* have commenced".

Alberuni mentioned the dates of the beginning of the four *yugas*. Third of *Vaisakha* started the *Krita yuga*. The ninth of *Kartika* the beginning of the *Treta yuga*. 15th of *Magha* beginning of the *Dvapara yuga*. The thirteenth of *Asvayuga*, the beginning of the *Kaliyuga*. Alberuni noted quite confidently "According to my opinion these days are festivals, sacred to the *yugas*, instituted for the purpose of alms giving, for the performance of some rites and ceremonies, as, e.g. the Commemoration days in the year of the Christians. However we must deny that the four *yugas* could really have commenced on the days here mentioned."

Alberuni appreciated the spirit behind the observance of these festivals specially because the poor got some help. He recorded "No doubt, most of the feast days enumerated in the preceding belong to this kind of days, for they are devoted to alms giving and banqueting. If people did not expect to

gain thereby a reward in heaven, they would not approve of the rejoicing and merriments which are characteristic of these days.”

(Original book by Alberuni p. 292 translated version
Vol. II p. 187)

Alberuni appreciatively often referred to the works of Varahamihira, one of the gems (member of *Navaratna* of Vikramaditya). He referred repeatedly to *Pancha Siddhatntika* by Varahamihira. As also considered for thousands of years in India and as mentioned by Varahamihira, Alberuni confirmed the Indian festival during the time of eclipses. He recorded in the chapter on Indian festivals that “Most propitious lines are, further, the times of solar and lunar eclipses. At that time, according to their belief all the waters of the earth become as pure as that of the Ganges.”

Similarly, Alberuni even warned against the inauspicious days, “If it happens within the course of one civil day that the moon revolves in the ‘latter part of some station, then enters the following station, proceeds through the whole of it and enters a third station, as that in one single day she stands in three consecutive stations, such a day is called *trihaspaka* (in modern days we call it *trihasparsha*), and also *triharkasha*. It is an unlucky day, being evil, and it is counted among the *punyakala*.”

(Alberuni’s original book page 294
Translated version, Vol. II, p. 191)

Alberuni described in detail the lunar days as *titthis*.

Quoting Varahamihira’s *Samhita* (Eleventh chapter) Alberuni noted, “I have spoken of the comets not before having exhausted what is in the books, of Ganga, Parasara, Asita and Devala, and in the other books, however numerous they may be.”

The details will help any student to know the early history of astronomy in India.

Alberuni agreed with Varahamihira who said “comets are such beings as have been on account of their merits raised to

heaven, whose period of dwelling in heaven has elapsed and we are then redescending to the earth."

Quoting *Matsya Purana* Alberuni noted, "There are four rains and four mountains, and their basis is the water. The earth is placed on four elephants, standing in the four cardinal direction which raise the water by their trunks to make the seeds grow. They sprinkle water, in summer and snow in winter. The fog is the servant of the rain raising itself up to it and adorning the clouds with the black colour."

Alberuni has narrated, quoting the *Vayu Purana*, "The wind and the sun's rays raise the water from the ocean to the sun. If the water were to drop down from the sun, rain would be hot. Therefore the sun hands the water over to the moon, that it should drop down from it as cold water and refresh the world."

Some of the ideas in the *Puranas* may sound indeed strange. Even Indians themselves may have their doubts about their authenticity. We must not forget that these ideas are at least one thousand years old. For instance today every body knows about Newton's Theory or Einstein's but they existed even before. Similarly the existing thinking even in highly specialised subjects as described in the *Puranas* seem to be simply imaginary. Alberuni, as a great scholar and familiar with the ancient literature of India, Greece and Rome will tell you himself that there is nothing extraordinary about it. He observed "If you compare these, traditions with those of the Greeks regarding their own religion, you will cease to find the Hindu system strange."

Alberuni studied all the *Puranas*. He first defined *Puranas* which, are 18 in number. *Purana* means first, eternal. "There are eighteen *Puranas* most of them called by the names of animals, human or angelic beings, because they contain stories about them, or because the contents of the book refer in some way to them or because the book consists of answers which the creature whose name forms the title of the book has given to certain questions.

Alberuni, quite an authority on *Puranas* tells us "The *Puranas* are of human origin, composed, by the so called *Rishis*." In the following he give a list of their names, as he had heard them, and committed them to writing from dictation :

1. *Adi Purana*, (the first).
2. *Matsya Purana*, (the fish).
3. *Kurma Purana*, (the tortoise).
4. *Varaha Purana*, (the boar).
5. *Narasimha Purana*, (A human being with a lion's head)
6. *Vamana Purana*, (the Dwarf).
7. *Vayu Purana*, (the wind).
8. *Nanda Purana*, (A servant of Mahadeva).
9. *Skanda Purana*, (A son of Mahadeva).
10. *Aditya Purana*, (the sun).
11. *Soma Purana*, (the moon).
12. *Samba Purana*, (the son of Vishnu).
13. *Brahmanda Purana*, (Heaven).
14. *Markendeya Purana*, (A great Rishi).
15. *Tarkshya Purana*, (The Bird Garuda).
16. *Vishnu Purana*, (Narayana).
17. *Brahma Purana*, (Nature charged with preservation of the world).
18. *Bhavisya Purana*, (Future things).

The Cultural History of India Vol. II quoted Alberuni describing the old system of *Sati*. It recorded, "Alberuni also observed that a woman in India has to choose between two things after the death of her husband—either to burn herself or to remain a widow till her death. Alberuni reported that women of advanced age and those who had children did not burn themselves. Although according to the same authority the widow preferred to burn herself because of ill treatment by her relations it is a fact that the widows were not coerced to do so during this period."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. II, pp. 497-98)

This was unfortunately the system, prevalent some times even now although strictly forbidden by law after it was taken

up by great builders of modern India like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Alberuni's heart bleeding could clearly been recorded for the unfortunate helpless woman who already became helpless after the sudden and untimely demise of her husband.

Alberuni involved himself so much in Indian thinking and identified himself so much with the philosophy of the land that one could hardly describe him as a mere foreign traveller !

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The Ramayana

Maharishi Valmiki's *The Ramayana* "is essentially an epic work and is not like the miscellaneous character of the *Mahabharata*", thus the great philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, introduces the greatest epic of India in his masterly *Indian Philosophy*.

(Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*. Vol. I, p. 482)

It has perhaps the greatest impact on ordinary Indian's life. It has been translated in all major languages in India. The original text, as the story goes was written on the life of *Sri Rama* even before the birth of Ramchandra by Valmiki. The most authentic versions in Indian languages are Kamban's Tamil version, Bhaskara's Telugu translation, Tulsidas's Hindi version *Ramacharit Manas* and Krithivasa's Bengali version of the great epic.

Sri Rama has been the hero and the Central figure. Scholars feel "It must have attained its present form long before the last additions were made in the *Mahabharata*, for not only the complete Rama story, but even the epic *Ramayana* is known to the latter. The beginnings of the *Ramayana* may be placed about the same time as those of the *Mahabharata*. The two

epics show a striking resemblance in style, metre, and general views of religion and society."

According to the *Cultural Heritage of India*, "The first and the last Book of the *Ramayana* are latter additions. The bulk, consisting of Books II-VI, represents Rama as an ideal hero, In books I and VII, however, Rama is made an *avatara* (an incarnation of God), an incarnation of *Vishnu* and the epic poem is transformed into a *Vaishnava* text. The reference to the Greek, Parthians, and Sakas show that these Books cannot be earlier than the second century B.C."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV)

According to another scholar, "The period of the Epics succeeded the period of the *Upanishads*. In the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, doctrines were presented in the forms of stories and parables. In these poems of the heroic age recounting the qualities and exploits of exalted individuals, the *Vedic* gods are no longer supreme."

According to popular belief, substantiated by historical evidences, the *Ramayana* which centred round the life of Rama has been as "the first poetical work of purely, human origin in the literature of India, and its traditional author Valmiki, as the first Indian poet. The general style in which the poem has been composed differ from that of the verses portions of the *Vedas* by its greater diffuseness, simplicity, and charm."

(Swami Prabhavananda : *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, p. 81)

A very interesting point to be noted would be that the authors of the two great epics, unlike the author of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* were not Brahmins ! The author of the *Ramayana* Valmiki was a hunter by birth. Vyas, the author of the *Mahabharata*, son of Parasara one of the greatest sages of India, was the son of Satyavati who was a fisher woman.

The hero of the *Ramayana*, Rama was one of the incarnations of *Sri Vishnu*. He has been the embodiment of devotion and Truth. "The ordinary worshipper stressess His lovely

form and noble attributes. But the illumined devotee, sees Him eminent in all, and prays in the words of the *Adi Kavi*, the first poet of the world, in the following words :

“Thou art the embodiment of the highest virtues. Thou art the indweller, the Supreme Being, Thou art the greatest refuge and saviour of mankind.”

(*Valmiki Ramayana* VI. 117)

ADHYATMA RAMAYANA

Equally venerated sacred scriptures on Lord Rama says in the same voice, “Thou art the stainless, changeless, indetrustible, pure, and eternal wisdom and truth.”

Sri Rama has been the most popular idol or deity worshipped in whole of India. This has been mainly because of the spiritual powerhouse of the poet Valmiki who “erected” the character after a long lonely meditation.

In a famous speech delivered at the Shakespeare Club, California, Swami Vivekananda described the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as “the most ancient” epics (of India) Swamiji gave the substance of these two great masterpieces. Perhaps there could be no better interpretation. Vivekananda said, “They embody the manners and customs, the state of society, civilisation etc. of the ancient Indians. The oldest of these epics is called *Ramayana*, the life of Rama. There were some poetical literature before this—most of the *Vedas*, the sacred books of the Hindus, are written in a sort of metre but this book is held by common consent in India, as the very beginning of poetry.”

Swamiji, with his gracious touch of wisdom and wit made the story of *Ramayana* most fascinating. He described the *Ramayana* which has come down to us as “a very beautiful (literary) arrangement without equal in the literatures of the world.”

Who else but Vivekananda could describe his country's great epic the *Ramayana* as the best in the world ?

It would be interesting to know how the Swami narrated the life history of the author Ratnakar, the daring decoit.

"There was a young man that could not in any way support his family. He was strong and vigorous and finally became a highway robber; he attacked persons in the street and robbed them, and with that money he supported his family consisting of father, mother, wife and children. This went on continually until one day a great Saint called Narada was passing by, and the robber attacked him."

The sage asked the robber : Why are you going to rob me? It is a great sin to rob human beings and kill them. What do you incur all this sin for ? The robber said: "Why, I want to support my family with this money."

Now, said the sage, "do you think that they take a share of your sin also ?

"Certainly they do", replied the robber.

"Very good", said the sage, "make me safe by tying me here, while you go home and ask your people whether they will share your sin, in the same way as they share the money you make."

The man accordingly went to his father, and asked, "Father, do you know how I support you ?" He answered, "No, I do not." I am a robber, and I kill persons and rob them" "What ? You do that my son ? Get away ! You outcast !" He then went to his mother and asked her, "Mother, do you know how I support you ?" "No", she replied, "Through robbery and murder." "How horrible it is", "Cried the mother, "But, do you partake in my sin," said the son. "Why should I ?" I never committed a robbery, "answered the mother." Then, he went to his wife and questioned her, "do you know how I maintain you all ? "No" she responded "Why, I am a highway man, he rejoined, "and for years have been robbing people: that is how I support and maintain you all. And what I now want to know is, whether you are ready to share in my sin ?" "By no means, you are my husband, and it is your duty to support me."

The robber was shocked. Swamiji said, "The eyes of the robber were opened. "That is the way of the world. Even

my nearest relatives, for whom I have been robbing will not share my destiny." He came back to the place where he had bound the sage, unfastened his bonds, fell at his feet, recounted everything and said; "Save me ! What can I do ? The sage said, "Give up your present course of life you see, none of your family really loves you, so give up all these delusions. They will share your prosperity, but the moment you have nothing they will desert you. There is none who will share in your evil, but they will all share in your good. Therefore, worship Him, who alone stands by us whether we are doing good or evil. He never leaves us for love never drags down, knows no barter, no selfishness."

The traditional story has been that Narada asked him to utter the holy name of Rama. The man did so much of criminal works and fell into so big sinful pit that he could not even utter the name of Rama ! Then Narada showed him a dead branch of wood and asked him how do you find that branch. Is it alive or dead? Ratnakar said ; it was dead, *marā*. Narada asked him to repeat that *marā*. If you repeat *marā* it would become Rama !

Narada left after giving him the holy *mantra*. He taught him how to meditate. In course of time Ratnakar got merged in the divine experiment in which he got real joy. He forgot food, sleep and finally himself. He got lost in deep meditation. Years passed. Nobody knew the whereabouts of Ratnakar, the dreaded dacoit.

One day after years, Narada was passing by that spot. He remembered Ratnakar but could not locate him. Instead he found a mound of ant hill. Out of that mound came the human voice Rama. Narada got him released from the white ant mound and declared "Ratnakar you are no longer a dacoit. You, by means of your prolonged days' meditation have got inner vision. You have the great fortune of the rare opportunity of gaining God-realisation. I am happy with your spiritual power." As the white ants are known in Sanskrit as Valmiki the sage who got God realisation inside such an ant-hill came to be known as Valmiki. "Now you are a purified sage, you are a God man.

A completely illiterate robber that Ratnakar was, by virtue of his deep spiritual exercise and prolonged meditation became a saintly poet. He became the first great poet of the world—the *Adi Kavi*.

How did Ratnakar, the dacoit, turn a poet? Swami Vivekananda gave details of the historic incident. "And this is how he became a poet. One day as this sage, Valmiki, was going to bathe in the holy river Ganges he saw a pair of doves wheeling round and round and kissing each other. The sage looked up and was pleased at the sight, but an arrow whizzed past him and killed the male dove. As the male dove fell down on the ground, the female dove went on whirling round and round the dead body of its companion in grief. In a moment the poet became miserable and looking round he saw the hunter, "Thou art a wretch; he cried, 'without the smallest mercy. Thy slaying hand would not even stop for love!'"

"What is this? What am I saying? the poet thought to himself. 'I have never spoken in this sort of way before, And then a voice came. Be not afraid. This is poetry that is coming out of your mouth. Write the life of Rama in poetic language for the benefit of the world.'"

(Swami Vivekananda : *Complete Works*, Vol. IV pp. 59-73)

Here students of Indian philosophy and literature, must notice a basic traditional belief and faith. About the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* we are told they are self revealed—*apauruseya*. This means they have not been written or composed by human beings, whereas the two great epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have been written by men. "Had they been so written, then the author of the *Vedas*, like Valmiki and Veda Vyas' the authors respectively of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, would have been remembered by us."

So, although the *Vedic* hymns too were in verses and musical they were not composed by human beings. They were not written anywhere. They came down from mouth to mouth—*prabachana*. Whereas the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were written by two eminent known sages of ancient India. They are *pauruseya*.

The most important feature of the author of the *Ramayana*, who had the credit of becoming world's first poet was that he was not only a hunter by profession and a highway robber, he was absolutely illiterate and ignorant. How could he acquire such great knowledge suddenly ?

Honestly speaking it was not sudden. There were two main factors that led to this sudden burst of knowledge to an ignorant hunter. First, his giving up everything—family attachment, lust for a prosperous life and above all the feeling that the so called relations were mere hallucinations and *maya* and that nobody cared for the other and most of the people were self centred. This created in the mind of the robber a keen desire to explore further real truth. He was lucky to have immediately a great sage like Narada as his spiritual preceptor. One can expect two things from a *Guru* or the Preceptor; firstly guidance in spiritual experiments and Secondly, *Kripa*, blessings. Without these special boons no disciple, however hard working or spiritual minded he may be, can never attain God-realisation. Valmiki got this rare blessings from his guru Narada.

To this, a third important factor could be added and that was these great sages—had their own plan of actions—spiritual schedules. In that schedule, the creation of an ideal character like that of Ramchandra must have been felt by Narada. He was in need of an appropriate medium. This medium has to be a noble soul through whom you can transmit power—spiritual and moral—finding that everything else has been just a myth and that the real Truth must be in search of secret Truth, sat in meditation deeply for years. The hill ant showed the way for the Sage's meditation. He must have been sitting straight in deep meditation quite oblivious of the surroundings. The fact that millions of white ants covered him showed again two things—it was quite for a long time that he meditated absolutely in quietitude and secondly that his mind was in absolute communion with Infinity. Ants and the hills and the earthly surroundings were things which were absolutely superficial. Perseverence, austerity, hard penance led him

to success, once you get divine enlightenment, knowledge flow to you like a violent spiritual current.

THE REAL STORY

The *Ramayana* has a real popular story. Even illiterate persons can tell you the real characters of the epic. They can stage Ram Lila, a drama most popular throughout India. It required no rehearsal. The story has been so well known that it could be acted in the stage, even without any prompting.

What is the popular story? Ayodhya, the sacred birth place of Rama was the centre of all activities. Rama's father Dasaratha was a king, something like a feudal lord of Ayodhya. He obviously was an extremely a pious ruler. Otherwise how could he have Ramachandra, an incarnation of *Sri Vishnu*, as his son.

King Dasaratha had three Queens—Kaushalya, Kaikeyi and Sumithra. He had no children and was a sad man. Vashistha, the greatest enlightened of the sages, headed a sacrifice organised by Dasaratha to propitiate the divine Gods. All important and learned sages were extended cordial royal invitations. It has been recorded, "The ceremony was not without effect. From the sacred fire on the altar there arose a celestial being of matchless beauty, holding in his arms a certain food which, when eaten, causes conception. This incidentally showed how even medical Science had made tremendous progress during the days of the *Ramayana*. This seed was distributed among the three queens. In due course of time, Queen Kaushalya gave birth to Rama, revered by all and possessed of all virtues. Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata, quite brave and rich in valour. Sumithra had twin sons—Lakshman and Shatrughna.

In course of time all the four princes were being trained in almost all the disciplines of a royal palace.

By the time the four brothers became young bright boys of sixteen the great sage Vishwamitra who had besides the spiritual background, all the knowledge of administration and found himself and his colleague sages in great trouble because

of the frequent attack by the demons. The demons selected particularly the hermitage of Vishwamitra. All the clouds had their silver linings and this, contact of Vishwamitra with king Dasaratha's court bore greater boon than expected.

On hearing about the distress of Vishwamitra all the four young royal brothers immediately agreed to fetch the demons who had been attacking the sage and damaging his hermitage constantly. But quietly Vishwamitra selected only Rama to face the situation. Vishwamitra did it because he, by intuition knew, that more than muscle power, the eldest of the royal brothers could settle his problem by mere divine power. He was one of the greatest sages and had great spiritual power too. He took Rama with him but Lakshmana, the most loyal brother of Rama was his constant companion. He would not leave the eldest one all alone ever and that too in the face of danger. So, Lakshmana too accompanied Vishwamitra. Surprisingly, these two young men tackled the situation and the demon was not only defeated, he was totally annihilated.

In the meanwhile although all the four brothers got their thorough education in handling the weapons and administration, Dasaratha the King nominated Rama to succeed him. So Rama became the Crown Prince, *Yuvaraj*, the would-be king. Nobody challenged the decision.

SITA

At that time King Janaka, the great philosopher King, fully enlightened with great spiritual powers ruled Mithila a neighbouring principality. He had an adopted daughter Sita, fully accomplished and a paragon of beauty. Sita, the foster daughter was not an ordinary mortal. She had emerged from *Dharitri*, Mother Earth and was found in a field. She, obviously, had no parents. *Sita* literally means the furrow made by a plough. Sita was not only beautiful and well versed in all qualities of a princess—as she was affectionately taken care of by the Rajarishi Janaka, she was pure and immaculate.

HARADHANU BHANGA

Princess Sita reached a marriagable age. King Janaka thought of arranging her marriage in a befitting way. The royal custom of the Kshatriyas was to arrange an assembly of princes from neighbouring principalities. Check their valour by their performances on weapons, specially in archery prevalent during those days and leave the selection of the bridegroom to the bride. This was known as *Swayambara*, *Swayam* means self and *bara* means the bridegroom. Now Janaka had declared that Sita would select her husband in such a princely *Swayambara Sabha*. Vishwamitra had just witnessed Ramachandra's valour and himself knew his power. So he took him from his hermitage to Mithila to join the royal princess' assembly. Lakshmana followed him as usual.

The test was clear cut archery. King Janaka received Vishwamitra, Rama and Lakshmana most cordially. Sita's beauty, qualities and her fame for purity was too well known. So a large number of princes assembled at Janaka's palace. There was a big bow which was known as *Haradhanu*. It was so named because it was a gift from Lord *Shiva*, also known as *Hara*. Now Janaka declared in the open assembly that any of the princes present who could break the *Haradhanu*, the huge bow would get in return Sita in marriage.

Obviously all the princes present tried their luck but failed. It was not an ordinary test. Finally, came the turn of Rama. He was already a known champion in archery. For him it was a child's game. So he just took the mighty bow in his hand and within the twinkling of an eye, broke it to pieces. Rama's valour was well known. He was an extremely handsome young man, with lotus eyes and golden complexion. In her heart of hearts Sita too had selected Rama as her husband, Now that he succeeded in breaking the *Haradhanu*, her desire was fulfilled. Sita formally selected Rama as her husband. The royal marriage was arranged with all the pomp and grandeur it deserved. The whole of Ayodhya celebrated the occasion. It was a historic marriage.

Rama reached Ayodhya with his royal bride. Dasaratha was a wise man. He thought it was high time that Rama took charge of the kingdom. He almost finalised the schedule for coronation. Dasaratha consulted his subjects for it was purely a democratic system of rule. They all readily agreed. Rama was to sit on the throne next day. It was indeed an excitement for the whole royal palace. The whole kingdom was in a festive mood.

THE PALACE INTRIGUE

Unfortunately, as if from no where came a bolt from the blue. A palace intrigue, something not so popular in India, intervened. Kaikeyi, the middle queen, had a maid servant. Her name was Manthara. This maid was a very intriguing type, a very shrewd and to be precise, wicked.

Long ago Dasaratha, the King got severely wounded in a hunting expedition. Although everybody took full care of the king, the Queen Kaikeyi took special care and on recovery, the king was naturally moved by her loyalty and devotion. He promised to offer to grant her two boons. Left to herself and to be just in judging her nature, Queen Kaikeyi was never a crooked woman. She was as simple as any of the other two. But she was brainwashed by the maid servant Manthara who wanted Kaikeyi to enca h the royal promise without any further delay Kaikeyi, honestly speaking, had even totally forgotten about it. For an Indian woman, service to the husband is a pure service and she infact never expected anything in return. But wicked Manthara advised the Queen to press for the two promised boons.

After all Kaikeyi too was a mother, a woman. In her heart of hearts she, it must be appreciated, felt quite jealous that Rama, her step son was going to sit on the throne next day and not her own son Bharat. But she kept silent. It was her hidden green eyed monster that was gnawing her mind. It was at this weak moment Manthara came with her sly advice. Why not ask the king to grant your two promised boons ?

This struck Kaikeyi and she at once agreed. She approached the King and asked Dasaratha for granting her the two boons.

What were the two boons ?

The boons Kaikeyi asked were not only dangerous, they were devastating. Dasharatha himself could never imagine that such a devoted gentle lady Kaikeyi would ever put him into such an embarrassing situation and tension. "The evil minded maidservant in her employ began to work upon her jealousy with regard to Rama being installed on the throne, and instigated to feel how nice it would be for her if her own son had succeeded as the King. The servant also suggested to ask from the king the two promised boons; one would be that her own son Bharat should be placed on the throne, and the other, that Rama should be sent to the forest and be exiled for fourteen years.

Dasaratha was non plussed and crest fallen. He did not know what to do. Rama, was everything to him. But he was not only a very pious but honest king. To him Truth was greater than his own life. And he had no other alternative but to honour his promise. Sri Rama heard everything. He could realise the mental agony of his dear sage-like father. He came forward to solve the problem. He offered to leave the idea of sitting on the throne. He volunteered to go in self exile to the forest for fourteen years. His father's promise must be honoured he thought. But both Sita, the devoted loving wife and loyal brother Lakshmana would not like the idea of leaving the crown Prince to live in the forest all alone. They too volunteered to accompany Rama. In spite of all requests from Rama not to follow him and leave the royal palace, both Sita and Lakshmana accompanied Rama in exile to the forest. Rama begged Sita not to follow him. She replied : Wherever Rama goes, there goes Sita. The suffering and hardships of a forest life, O Rama, if I have your love, will become experiences of joy. Where you are, it is heaven, and where you are not, everything is darkness. And Rama answered : Even heaven will not be heaven to me without you by my side ' They left for the forest. King Dasaratha could not stand this

great agony. He died soon unable to bear the pang of separation.

Bharat, for whom Kaikeyi, in connivance with Manthara the maid, arranged the royal throne was not in the town. He had been to Kaikeyi's parents' house. He was immediately informed of both the bad and good news. He did not welcome the idea of his usurping the royal throne denying the real heir, his dear elder brother. He rushed to the forest to get Rama brought back to Ayodhya. He entreated him to return and sit on the throne as he was the crown prince. Rama did not agree. He did not like to break the promise given by his departed father. Truth and a promise, a word of honour in India had greater value than a mere throne.

Bharat had to return. He was really disappointed. But he did one thing. He carried the wooden sandals of Rama and placed them duly on the throne and took the responsibility of the king by proxy. He became the Regent of the real king voluntarily. This again was another example, with no parallel in Indian history—for that purpose, anywhere else in the world where an individual enthroned on king refused power and authority only because it was duly not his—the moral value, ethical side of life, has perhaps been the first example of its kind. Although through out the world and in India Rama was venerated and worshipped for his great sacrifice to keep his father's promise, this aspect of Bharat's role by not grabbing the throne was also equally praiseworthy. Bharat ruled Ayodhya for all the fourteen years but did not sit on the throne even for a day. The whole thing was done by proxy.

Rama selected a hermitage on the bank of the sacred river Godavari in South India. The three—Rama, Sita and Lakshman lived on hunting deer and gathering forest fruits.

Troubles however never come alone. They come in legions. The three were living quite happily in the peaceful forest. Both Rama and Lakshmana were exquisitely manly and handsome. A demon giantess Surpanakha, sister of the demon king Ravana tried to make advance first on Rama and on his refusal towards Lakshmana. She offered herself to the prince

his partner. His refusal to marry her only infuriated her. She first wanted to marry Ram and was told that he was already married. Only then she approached Lakshmana, who too was married, to Urmila. Surpanakha, thinking Sita to be the only obstacle in her way, attacked her. Lakshmana could not stand it. He, in one stroke cut off her nose. In revenge, Surpanakha rushed to her brother and narrated the whole event. Ravana had already made a name as a great warrior. He conquered even the gods. He wanted to take revenge and consoled the sister.

Ravana came to the hermitage in the guise of a monk and asked for alms. Meanwhile, through a miracle he (Ravana) approached Maricha who was a master of black magic. He was directed to take the shape of a golden deer and somehow to draw the attention of Sita. Sita would ask Rama to get her the golden deer and while Rama goes in pursuit of the deer and in his absence Ravana would abduct her. That was the plan. It worked according to plan. While leaving the hermitage Rama repeatedly asked Lakshmana not to leave the hermitage till his return. But suddenly both Sita and Lakshmana heard the voice of Rama calling Lakshmana to come to Rama's rescue. Lakshmana did not know what to do. He could not leave Sita alone; at the same time Rama's voice was being repeatedly and clearly heard to come to his rescue. Lakshman made a circle and warned Sita not to cross that at any cost and left in search of Rama. Meanwhile, Ravana, in the garb of a monk knocked the door and asked for alms. Sita explained that there was no male member present at home and she could not come out but the mendicant threatened to curse her. Sita forgot about Lakshman's circle and crossed it and came out with the alms and was at once abducted by Ravana.

Sita was intelligent. Helplessly she was abducted but to show the way of their journey she started throwing away her ornaments one by one so that on their return, when both Rama and Lakshmana started searching for her, they would know the route.

Sita was taken as a captive and kept at Lanka, the capital of the Demon king Ravana. The Demon King proposed to marry her but chastity personified, the loyal wife of Rama, Sita refused even to talk to the Demon King. She, resultantly, was made to sleep under a tree in the *Ashoka Vana*, day and night without food.

The brothers on their return were shocked. They had no clue even to search her. A group of mankeys approached them and their leader Hanuman, an incarnation of devotion, volunteered to assist Rama. Swami Vivekananda narrated in a seminar abroad, Hanuman's devotion to Rama was so great that he is till worshipped by the Hindus as "the ideal of a true servant of the Lord." Vivekananda explained clearly to the foreign audience "you see by the 'monkeys' and demons are meant the aborigines of South India." Dr. Hira Lal had, by extensive study in depth has confirmed this in his thesis recently.

The monkeys described how they saw a man flying in a chariot with a most beautiful lady who was bitterly weeping and resisting. They also told Rama how the lady threw down some of her ornaments from the chariot. They found some of them and Rama could at once recognise them belonging to Sita. They gave the information of the demon king. Meanwhile there was a dispute between the monkey king Vali and Sugriva over the throne. Rama helped Sugriva. He killed Vali and made Sugriva the King and also made him his ally.

Although, Sri Rama was an incarnation of God and was justice personified, it has been a puzzle whether his action against the pious elder brother King Vali, was at all justifiable. And most unfortunately, Vali was killed when he was holding his prayer. The actions of Rama, which any analytical critic would raise—his banishment of Sita even after *Agni Pariksha*—Fire test, banishment of Lakshmana, the most ideal brother who shared his suffering ungrudgingly. But no human being is all-perfect and Rama too was a human being—may be a super human being.

Hanuman with his team searched everywhere for Sita. They came to know that Ravana had collected the most beauti-

ful women on earth and kept them in his harem as concubines. But one thing was sure. Sita would prefer to die rather than joining them in the harem. In fact she had already refused even to talk to Ravana. Hanuman's guess proved correct. He found Sita under an Ashoka tree. She had become "pale and thin like the new moon that lies low in the horizon." Hanuman did not leave the spot. He saw how the Demon King's guards came and tortured her to agree to marry Ravana. Rama had given a 'Signet ring' to Hanuman as an identification of his association with him. Otherwise how would she know who this 'monkey' was. One day, Hanuman appeared before Sita with the signet ring. He informed her that the search party would rescue her soon. He even offered to carry her on his broad shoulders if she agreed. He said, "with one leap I can clear the ocean and get you back to my Lord !" Sita would not touch any man except her husband. She preferred remaining where she was. But what was the proof to show Rama that Hanuman had met Sita ? So Sita gave him a jewel from her hair to carry to Rama. Hanuman returned happily to convey to Rama the glad tidings.

Rama, now got ready with an army. To connect India with Lanka, a bridge known as *Sethu Bandha* was quickly constructed. Every one, including, as the traditions say, even the tiny squirrels, helped him to build this bridge.

Sri Rama was the Seventh Incarnation of God. To win over, Ravana the strong Demon King who conquered the three worlds and of whom even Gods were afraid, Rama arranged an invocation of Durga, the Goddess of War, the Universal mother. This was not the time for Durga Puja. Real *Durga Puja*, also known as, *Basanti Puja* is normally held during the spring season. This was autumn. Because this *Durga Puja* was arranged untimely and suddenly, it was known as *Akal bodhan*—untimely invocation. Strangely enough, henceforth *Durga Puja* is being held regularly during autumn season. The all powerful Mother was to be worshipped on the *Sandhi Kshan* (Between *Mahastami* and *Navami*) with 108 lotus flowers. To prove his loyalty and check his sincerity, the Mother removed one of the lotus flowers. There was no

time to collect another lotus. So a problem arose. Rama is also known as *Rajiva Lochana*, the lotus eyed one. So he decided immediately to get one of his eyes removed and offer to the Goddess. As he was on the point of piercing it by an arrow the Universal Mother appeared before him and blessed him. With the blessings of the all powerful Mother Durga, Rama defeated Ravana, the most unconquerable demon. But Ravana was one of the trusted attendants of Sri Vishnu and was once caused to appear on earth seven time for his lapse of duty. Sri Vishnu had given him two options—first to appear on earth seven times in human body as friend and devotee but this would be shortened to only three appearances if he chose to appear as a foe. Ravana and Kumbhakarna both came to know that their period to return to *Vishnulok* was now nearer. Both prayed to Rama.

Rama returned to Ayodhya. The whole kingdom was agog with gaity. They celebrated the victory of Rama over Ravana. Ever since, the ceremony is being observed as *Ram Lila*. It is the most popular among all the Indian festivals. Men, women and children join in hundreds of thousands in the burning of effigy of Ravana, which came to be symbolised as evil. *Ram Lila*, is a celebration of victory of (good) justice over evil. Bharat welcomed his brother. That has also been celebrated as *Bharat Milap*, union with Bharat. The first oath that Rama had to take was to look after his subjects. He must be *praja ranjaka*. As Swami Vivekananda observed "The king was the slave of his people and had to bow to public opinion."

A few years passed happily. But the subjects started murmuring that Sita had been stolen by a demon, and carried across the tha ocean. "They were not satisfied with the former *Agni Praiksha* (Fire Test). They clamoured for another, test, otherwise she must be banished."

Sita was resultantly banished. She lived with the eminent sage Valmiki who picked her up in the lonely forest. It was in the hermitage of the famous sage that Sita gave birth to two sons—twins—Lava and Kusha who were brought up by Valmiki. He taught them himself how to recite the *Ramayana*.

What an interesting scene like a drama. Lava and Kusha learning to sing the *Ramayana*, not knowing that it was about Rama, their own father. That has been the beauty and artistry of the great *Adikavi* Valmiki. The whole epic is replete with suspense. Swamiji wrote, "The drama in India was a very holy thing. Drama and music are themselves held to be religion. Any song—whether it be a love song or otherwise—if one's whole soul is in that song, he attains salvation; he has nothing else to do. So Valmiki dramatised the Life of Rama and taught Rama's two children how to recite and sing it."

Rama decided to perform *Asvamedh yagna*, a huge sacrifice. One would send a horse to different kingdoms. They would have to display their valour and defeat the army. On conclusion, the horse would be offered in the sacrifice. The arrangements were finalised and the huge sacrifice was to start. But, according to Hindu religion no ceremony in India can be performed by a married man without his wife. He must have the wife known as *Saha dharmini* with him.

But Sita was banished. To make the *Asvamedh Yagna* complete the subjects insisted on Rama's remarriage. So long Rama had been listening to all their demands. For the first time he raised his voice. "This cannot be. My life is Sita's.

It was decided to have a golden statue of Sita to make the sacrifice perfect. "They arranged even a dramatic entertainment to enhance the religious feeling in this great festival. Valmiki, the great sage poet came with his pupils Lava and Kusha, the unknown sons of Rama. A stage had been erected and everything was ready for the performance. Rama and his brothers attended with all nobles with a vast audience."

Lava and Kusha started singing the life of Rama which they had learnt from Valmiki. The charming voice of the children, their very innocent looking appearance and the theme of the story moved every one. Rama was simply moved when Sita came about. Rama did not know what to do. Valmiki told him, "do not be sad. I can show your Sita, here and

now." He brought Sita upon the stage. Rama was simply delighted to see her after a long time.

But once again the subjects started murmuring what about another Fire Test ? Actually she did qualify in the Fire Test earlier. This repeated humiliation was indeed too much. Sita appealed to Mother Earth to take her back. The Mother Earth opened. "Here is the test." Sita vanished into the bosom of the Mother Earth from where she had appeared.

Sita has been the most respected, an ideal of Indian womanhood. Even today, among the three ideals of Indian womanhood—Sita, Savitri, Arundhati—Sita tops the list.

The same story is repeated, although in a shorter version in the *Adhyatma Ramayana* in a simple and lucid style. It must have been authored by one who followed Valmiki religiously. It has been recorded that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was specially fond of *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

In fact a number of *Ramayanas* were written in all major languages of India and other important languages of the world.

THE MESSAGE OF THE RAMAYANA

In his masterly *Foundations of Indian Culture*, the great modern Saint Sri Aurobindo observed, "The *Ramayana* embodied for the Indian imagination its highest and tenderest human ideals of character, made strength and courage and gentleness and purity and fidelity and self sacrifice familiar to it in the suavest and most harmonious forms, coloured so as to attract the emotion and the aesthetic sense, stripped morals of all repellent austerity on one side, on the other of mere commonness and lent a certain high divineness to the ordinary things of life, conjugal and filial and maternal and paternal feelings, the duty of the prince and leader and the loyalty of follower and subject, the greatness of the great and the truth and worth of the simple, toning things ethical to the beauty of a more physical meaning by the glow of its ideal hues.

"The work of Valmiki has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India.

It has presented to it to be loved and imitated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship, or like Hanuman, Lakshman, Bharat the living human image of its ethical ideals ; it has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character, and it has evoked and fixed in it those finer and exquisite yet firm soul tones and that more delicate humanity of temperament which are a more valuable thing than the formal outsides of virtue and conduct."

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture*,
pp. 327-28)

Who else but Sri Aurobindo, with his full background of deep and vast knowledge in Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and other ancient literature and the study of their scriptures could have summed up better the message of the *Ramayana*, briefly and precisely.

Sri Aurobindo has also given in detail the literary evaluation of the two great epics—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which we shall appreciate and be benefitted better after a brief background in the next chapter on the other great Indian epic *Mahabharata*. That would be necessary since Sri Aurobindo always made simultaneous references to both the epics while discussing their literary styles and philosophical mysticism of these two great classics.

RAMAYANA'S INFLUENCE ON INDIAN LITERATURE

The most important sanskrit treatise on the lives and themes of Valmiki's *Ramayana* was *Adhyatma Ramayana* written near about during fourteenth century A.D. A number of other versions of the *Ramayana* followed too. They include *Yogavasistha Ramayana*, *Ananda Ramayana* and the *Advaita Ramayana* or the *Rama-purva-tapaniya Upanishad*, the *Ramottara tapaniya Upanishad* and the *Ramarahashya Upanishad*. Many of the *Puranas* and the *Upapuranas* also, "give the Rama story generally according to Valmiki's *Ramayana*, only at times differing in minor details."

A very important post *Ramayana* treatise, the great epic *Mahabharata* contains *Ramopa Khyana* which repeated Valmiki's Rama story. In the *Vanaparvam* it has not mentioned the fire ordeal of Sita nor the incidents of the *Uttarakanda*."

Almost all important Sanskrit literature had the clear influence and soft touch of the *Ramayana*. Perhaps Asvaghosa, a Sanskrit scholar and author of the first-second century A.D. was the first to have been greatly influenced by the *Ramayana* style, "many a poetic imagery" and even diction. But he did not take any theme from the *Ramayana* however. Next to Asvaghosa, the most important poet Kalidasa borrowed ideas from the *Ramayana*. Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* was written during the fifth century A.D., "which treats about Rama" and the poet "depends on the *Ramayana* of Valmiki."

Critics have specially mentioned the greatest poet's indebtedness to Kalidasa. It has been recorded. "Of all the classical poets of Sanskrit he has been throughout most profoundly influenced by this epic, both in matter and in spirit. Kalidasa was led to perfection in his literary style and diction, poetic imagery and embellishments, by the great work of Valmiki. His artistic skill, calm and serene outlook on life, deep penetration into the human mind, his romantic treatment of Nature—all these have been foreshadowed in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Even in the development of the past plot of some of his works, and the delineation of his characters, the influence of the *Ramayana* on Kalidasa is evident. For instance, his Kanva is no other than Valmiki himself, the most humane of the Indian *rishis*, in another garb. The plot of the closing acts of the *Abhijnana Sakuntala* showing Sakuntala repudiated by Dusyanta and living in the hermitage of Maricha, where she gave birth to Bharata, seems to be modelled on the similar episode in the *Uttarakanda* of the *Ramayana*, describing Sita's banishment by Rama, her seeking shelter in Valmiki's hermitage, and there her giving birth to the twin sons."

In the sixth century A.D. Bhatti derives inspiration from Valmiki's *Ramayana* while writing down his *Ravana vadha*, very well received by Indian literary world and better known

as *Bhatti kavya*. This famous treatise “enjoyed popularity even outside India and influenced the authors of the Javanese *Ramayana*—*Kakawin* and *Charita Ramayana*. *Janaki Harana* by Kunaradasa, a highly appreciated literary piece derived its inspiration from Valmiki *Ramayana*. A number of great classic works followed Valmiki for his style and diction among whom mention may be made of the following important books.

1. The *Rama Charita* by Abhinanda which starts with Sita's abduction and ends with the death of Kumbha and Nikumbha.
2. The *Udara Raghava* by Sakalyamalla or Mallacharya.
3. The *Chitrabandha Ramayana* by Venkateswara.
4. The *Ramachandrodaya* in thirty cantos.
5. The *Yamaka Kavya*—*Rama Yamakarnava* by Venkatesa (seventeenth century).
6. The *Ramayana Manjari* by Khemendra of Kashmir (eleventh century A.D.).
7. The *Rama Charita of Sandhyakara*—Nandin (eleventh century A.D.).
8. The *Raghava Pandaviya* by Dhananjay (12th century).
9. The *Raghava Naisadiya* of Hara Datta Suri depicting the stories of Rama and Nala.
10. The *Yadava Raghaviya* by Venkatedharin depicting the stories of the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata Purana*.
11. The *Raghava Pandava Yadaviya* by Chidambara (sixteenth—seventeenth century and dealing with *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Purana*.
12. King Bhoja's famous *Ramayana Champu* (12th century).

Quite a number of dramas too were written which clearly reflected the direct influence of Valmiki *Ramayana*. The most outstanding among these literary works are Kalidasa's *Uttara Rama Charita* and *Mahavira Charita*. Even earlier, Bhasa had written his famous play *Pralina Nataka* and

Abhiseka Nataka during the third century A.D. "Bhasa dramatises in the first play almost the entire *Ramayana* story in seven acts while in the six acts of the second play he deals with the Rama story beginning at the slaying of Vali and anointment of Sugriva, and ending with the fire ordeal of Sita and coronation of Rama". Deviations were evident but the main theme remained the same.

Bhavabhuti, a contemporary of Kalidasa and also a member of the *Naya Ratna* (Nine gems) of Vikramaditya borrowed Valmiki *Ramayana* in two of his plays *Mahavir Charita* and *Uttara Rama Charita* which are considered to be two of his best works. It was *Bhavabhuti* who described Valmiki as the *Adi Kavi*, the first poet.

The *Ramayana* had distinctly influenced the Buddhist and Jaina literature specially in the Buddhist *Jatakas*. The Jaina literature have deviated from the original and put the main heroes as hailing from Jaina families.

Why earlier literature alone? Modern Indian literature owes a lot to Valmiki; *Madhavi Kandali* has translated *Valmiki Ramayana* into Assamese (14th century A.D.); Krittivasa's translation into Bengali (15th century) is till the best version of *Valmiki Ramayana*; Premananda, the most outstanding Gujarati author translated *Valmiki Ramayana* (17th century A.D.); Tulsidas's *Rama Charit Manas* (16th Century A.D.) is a landmark in Hindi literature. Chandra Jha has translated *Valmiki Ramayana* into Maithili. Adhinava Pampa also known as Nagachandra translated *Valmiki Ramayana* into Maithili. Abhinava Pampa also known as Nagachandra translated *Valmiki Ramayana* in 1100 A.D. It is popularly known as *Pampa Ramayana*. Divakara Prakasa Bhatta translated it into Kashmiri towards the end of the 18th century. *Rama Charitam* in Malayalam was written in the 14th century followed by Punam Namputiri's translation in the 15th century. *Ezhut-tachan* (1575—1650 A.D.) translated *Adhyatma Ramayana* which is the most popular household scripture in whole of Kerala as Krithivasa's *Ramayana* in Bengal. In Marathi it was Ekanatha the great saint of the 16th century who first

translated Valmiki Ramayana into Marathi—*Bhavartha Ramayana*. Balaram, Das's Oriya translation and Kamban's Ramayana in Tamil are classical works. Ranganatha rendered in into Telugu.

WHY RAMAYANA IS SO POPULAR ?

Why of all the ancient Indian scriptures the *Ramayana* has been the most popular epic ? Not because it epitomized the heroic deeds of Sri Rama only. Valmiki, through this great epic gave the whole world an idea of "sincere fraternal love, true friendship and the great principles that should govern kingship." No wonder "wherever a Hindu went he took with him his *Ramayana*." No wonder that more than one fourth of the total population of the world got closely in touch with this great epic. Truly the *Ramayana* has been described as the *Bible of the East*.

In "*India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*." it has been noted "wherever a Hindu went he took his copy of the *Ramayana*. This may or may not be correct in all the countries he visited but it is certainly true of South East Asia. It is not merely a coincidence that the *Ramayana* scenes are depicted in one form or the other in countries as far as Indonesia and as near as Burma, not to speak of Cambodia, Thailand. It is not a coincidence that the *Ramayana* is still being adored, venerated and played in various forms in several Asian countries. It is a living tradition. It is alive with all its grandeur not only among the Hindus of these countries but also among the Muslims and the followers of other religions. The *Ramayana* is a binding force, a common link and a common repository of an ancient heritage for all the countries of South and South East Asia."

(*India's Contribution to World Thought
and Culture*, p. 181)

No doubt, the *Ramayana* today is accepted as "a solid base for an edifice of great human culture."

The main reason for popularity of the *Ramayana* has been that it stood "more for an ideal than for a form, more for

precepts than for a ritualistic complex." The epic allowed great flexibility and catholicity not only in the treatment of subject but also in its mannerism. To quote a veteran scholar, "It was capable of adapting itself to the needs and the moods of all it happened to come in contact with. It is no wonder that the *Ramayana* had a number of versions not only in India but also outside her frontiers. Many of them had wide divergence in contents but that did not bother the Hindu mind. For example, the *Ramayana* story as incorporated in the *Dasaratha Jataka*. Its Chinese version depicted, Rama and Lakshmana as brothers of Sita. The old Javanese *Ramayana* concluded with the reunion of Rama and Sita but the Valmiki *Ramayana* ended in another form. It made mother earth split and hide Sita for ever. The Kamban *Ramayana* described that Ravana did not physically carry Sita, he took her by lifting the big chunk of earth on which she was standing."

(*Ibid*)

IMPACT OF THE RAMAYANA ON THE MASSES

The *Ramayana* is undoubtedly the most respected and read among all the holy scriptures of India. It has the greatest impact on the masses of people. Be they rich or poor, learned or illiterate, normally any Hindu would like to attend to a discussion on the *Ramayana*. In the remote villages throughout India, *Kathas* are quite popular where a Pandit recites in the local language, the popular versions of the *Ramayana*. In many temples this holy scripture is recited everyday. For instance, in New Delhi, there is arrangement for reciting a chapter from the *Ramayana* at the Lakshmi Narayana Temple. It is done every week at the Ramakrishna Mission or the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. These are only to give some of the thousands of instances of the popularity and appeal the epic has been commanding over the general masses. *Ram Lila*, the *Ramayana* in the form of dramas, also recall the story of the *Ramayana*. They are extremely popular. They are staged all over India during the advent of autumn. Whether in Northern India or South, whether it is East or West, the *Ramayana* is the one holy scripture which is respected by one and all.

According to *The Cultural Heritage of India*, "the epic that holds the people enthralled is the *Ramayana*. Whether it be Valmiki's Sanskrit original as is more often the case, or Kamban's Tamil version, hardly a day passes without some sweet voiced, gifted expounder sitting in a temple, *matha* (centre of religions preaching, public hall, or house front and explaining to hundreds and thousands, the story of the *dharma* that Rama upheld and the *adharma* by which *Ravana* fell."

(*The Cultural iHeritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 505)

DESCRIPTION OF NEIGHBOURING PLACES

The *Ramayana*, inter alia, gives many descriptions, not only of the flora and fauna of the land, it beautifully gives account of the main seasons specially the rainy season that is most captivating. It does, whenever chances occur, refers to the economic prosperity of the land. Burma for instance (which formed part of India during those days) is described as quite prosperous. A great scholar, while talking on India and the outside world before Asoka, tells us clearly that "The *Ramayana* speaks of Burma as the land of silver mines."

Another important feature to be noticed is about the importance of forests. The beauty of the forests, the rivers, the varieties of flowers that beautify the land have been highly and skilfully described. In the *Ramayana* also in the *Mahabharata*, we come across descriptions of many *asramas*, retreats or hermitage of *Vanaprasthas* and *rishis* and of educational institutions. It has been very truly observed that the lure of the forest has always been great and deep for the Indian mind "

The *Ramayana* being the most representative of the epics and work of high literary value obviously could not escape this aspect even with efforts.

Deriving his sources from Valmiki's *Ramayana*, a leading authority on the aborigines of Central India, Dr. Hira Lal saw in the story of the *Ramayana* an account of Kosala Aryans expanding towards Dakshina Kosala. He showed that the distances and directions of localities as, given in Valmiki's

Ramayana indicate Lanka's position at Mt. Amarakantaka ; that Lanka in Gondi meant an island as well as a hill top, and Godavari a river; that the sea near Lanka was the reservoir formed by the river Son at the base of Amarakantaka ; and that Gonds had a tradition that they were descendents of Ravana and the Vanaras were the Oraons or Vraons."

(Hira Lal : *Rama-Ravana War in the Avadhi, Hindi Region, Varanasi*)

Commenting on the above observation, *the Cultural Heritage of India*, (Vol. I, p. 48) noted, "This is indeed the most objective rational interpretation of the *Ramayana* story."

RAMAYANA ABROAD : IN CAMBODIA, CHINA, INDONESIA, THAILAND

The *Ramayana* is enjoyed in ballet form in many countries of the world. Recently it has been displayed in ballet form in Moscow.

Dr. Radhakrishnan recorded when he went to Cambodia he saw the *Ramayana* ballet and enjoyed it. "I saw a ballet there from the *Ramayana* and the daughter of the royal Highness Prince Sihanouk took the leading part of Sita." So the *Ramayana* is even in modern times, quite popular in Cambodia.

But why ?

Kambuja, modern Cambodia was much influenced by Indian art and culture. Their temples have close resemblance of the Satavahana, Gupta and Pallava art of Amaravati, Deogarh and Mamallapuram. Angkor is a living testimony to this "wherein finest executions were accomplished." But gradually changes took place and the capital was shifted to Kohkar as a result of which the temple activities too got shifted there. "The pediments, lintels and riches of these temples depict the *Ramayana* story. A temple bearing *Ramayana* at Kohkar was built by Jaya Varman IV in 921." The temple has been known as *Prasat An Temple* and lies some 60 miles north west of Angkor. At Angkor, a famous *Ramayana* bearing temple is called *Bantiary Srei Temple* which was constructed in 967

A.D. by a Brahmana of the royal blood named Yajnavaraha, a tax collector for Rajendrarvarman and Jayavarman. During the 11th & 12th centuries a few more beautiful temples were built, King Adityavarman II (1050—66) built the Baphoun Mountain Temple. King Surjavarman II (1113—52) built Thomanon Temple but his most popular work was the building of Angkor Vat Temple which was dedicated to Vishnu. A close look at the facial features of the images show a straight line of the hair, level brows, sloping eyes and full and wide lips. Besides, the images are characterised by facial calmness and smile.”

In Cambodia sculptures depicting the following *Ramayana* story are yet not only attractive, they are popular. These include the sculptures showing Fighting between Rama and Ravana where “The scene is beautifully depicted in four panels between the decorative strips of foliage of the Baphoun Mountain Temple. From top to bottom Ravana who has ten heads and twenty hands is riding a chariot being drawn up by a horse having anthropomorphic face. He shoots arrow off towards Rama who replies in the same tone.” Hanuman is also prominently depicted in the sculpture.”

RAMAYANA IN CHINA

The Buddhist *Jatakas* have incorporated *Rama-Katha*. According to most authentic versions, “The Sanskrit or Pali versions of the *Ramayana* stories were translated into Chinese. Thus, the Jataka of an unnamed King, the 46th story of Roku-do-Jik-Kyo translated by Ko-So-c(247 A.D.) and the Nidora of King Ten Luxuries,” the first story of Zo-ho-Zo-Kyo translated by “Kik-Ka-Ya, were translated into Chinese. Their Sanskrit or Pali originals are completely lost.”

In the *Pali Jataka* the story was told to a landlord who was sad because of his father's demise. The version departs at many places but keeps the main ideas of the *Ramayana*. Here Dasaratha was described as a ruler of Varanasi. The exaggerations were unbelievable and absurd. It noted Dasaratha had sixteen thousand queens of whom the eldest one bore two sons and one daughter, Rama Pandita and Lakshmana

and Sita. It narrated "in course of time queen consort died and the next one Kaikeyi became the queen consort of Dasaratha. She won the heart of the lord by her favourite deeds hence he allowed her to ask for a boon. For the time being she requested for postponement. In the meantime she gave birth to a son named Bharat. One day when Bharata was seven years old, Kaikeyi reminded the emperor to fulfil the boon which he had, promised, and asked the throne for her son. The King got annoyed but at the same time he thought that attempts might be made to kill his other sons. He, therefore, asked them to go to other neighbouring kingdom. When, according to Soothsayers, the emperor was to die, he cautioned them to return after 12 years. Nine years after the departure of Rama, Dasaratha died and the message was carried to Rama by Bharata who heard it with courage. At the same time he was cautioned to announce it before Lakshmana and Sita. They were asked to enter into a pond and the news was thrice announced and each time both of them fainted. At last they were brought out of the pond and Bharata requested Rama to return to take the reigns of the kingdom. Rama told him that he would come only after the expiry of banishment, but allowed his slippers to be carried by Bharata who ruled in the name of Rama. After the expiry of the stipulated period Rama and Sita came back and ascended the throne."

(Rouse, W.H.D. Cambridge 1901 quoted by *India's Contribution to the World Thought and Culture*, p. 182)

RAMAYANA IN INDONESIA

Truly, *Ramayana* has been described as the Holy Bible in the East. The *Ramayana* by Valmiki penetrated into Indonesian culture right from the fifth century A.D. There are important ancient Hindu Temples which discussed the *Ramayana* regularly. Most authentically one can say, "The mid ninth century at Prambanan the growth of a group of temples, known as *Loro Jonggrang*. The dynasty which was responsible is known as *Mataram*. Its rulers embraced Saivism as their

principal religion. However the group contain temples dedicated to *Siva*, *Brahma* and *Vishnu*. There is also an image of *Durga*, the *Sakti* of *Sita*. Hence the group of temples were named after her ; Loro Jonggrang." Inner parapet of the *Siva* temple and the galleries of the *Brahma* Temple depicted *Ramayana* scenes. Abduction of *Sita* has been faithfully depicted as described by Valmiki. Similarly scenes of Rama's killing of *Ravana* were also widely depicted as in the original text in Valmiki *Ramayana*. Other scenes like Rama's acting against the sea or *Angada* before Rama were also prominently displayed.

RAMAYANA IN THAILAND

Thailand was previously known as Siam. *Ramayana* there is known as *Kamakirti*. This excellent book vividly showed the influence of Valmiki *Ramayana* scene after scene. It recognised only one God who dictated Rama in all his activities. *Ramakirti* was very popular with the Thai masses of people. *Ramakirti* stories are enacted in theatres and shadow plays. Coloured puppets cut out from leather are manipulated by human hands. Even actors and actresses with the masks of Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman perform plays which are based on *Ramakirti* stories," originally derived from Valmiki *Ramayana*.

AN APPRECIATION

Whatever foreign or critical scholars may say, there is not the slight doubt that the *Ramayana* is an epic and that it is the first of its kind in the world. No less a person than Swami Vivekananda had noted that in his famous speech at the Shakespeare Club, California on January 31, 1900.

Prof. A.L. Basham in his *A Cultural History of India*, quoting Bhavabhuti one of the nine gems in Vikramaditaya's royal court, contemporary of Kalidasa) and other scholars accepted Valmiki as the First *Kavi*." He surmised, "the average date of composition seems to fall in the first century B.C."

Basham noted, "If *Kavya* is defined by its power to produce aesthetic experience (*rasa*) however, the *Ramayana* with its unforgettable story of the conflicts of human passions, is certainly a *Kavya*. This story was reworked by Valmiki if we apply the name to the author of the present text from old traditions containing two or three, probably, separate legends in several versions found in the Pali canon."

According to Prof. Basham, the seven legends are :

1. The palace intrigue at Ayodhya by Queen Kaikeyi resulting in her step son Rama's exclusion from the succession to his father's throne and sentence to twelve years' exile and

2. Rama, exiled in the South, finds its inhabitants oppressed by the raids of demons (*raksasas*) from Lanka (Ceylon) the island fortress of the demon King Ravana and himself suffered the abduction of Sita, his wife, by Ravana; he raised an army mostly of 'monkeys', gaining allies invaded Lanka, killed Ravana freed Sita, and returned home in triumph, the period of exile having elapsed and his noble stepbrother Bharata generously surrendering the throne to him. Prof. Basham went on to note, "the legend or myth of Ravana itself, with his victorious wars against the gods, may have been a separate source, as perhaps was that of the great 'monkey' herd Hanuman, son of the wind God. Valmiki's finest cantos were surely those of the palace intrigue, with the psychological study of the characters of Kaikeyi and her confidante. The apocryphal last book of the *Ramayana* added a tragic ending. Sita's exile on suspicion of unchastity, when a captive, and final disappearance. This changes the main *rasa* to the compassionate, whereas originally the poem would be heroic though with a considerable compassionate element resulting from Rama's sufferings."

The two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* unlike the previous divine scriptures give proper practical guidelines to God a clean and righteous life. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, are all dealing only with God realisation. They are always at a very high level, much beyond the reach of the ordinary man.

The *Ramayana* teaches how to face hard realities of life. Human suffering, difficulties, intrigues, social problems, public criticism all such rude shocks make our lives miserable. It is through the teachings of the *Ramayana* that the ordinary man knows how to tackle these. Bharata got the throne. In the ordinary and normal cover history, anybody would have grabbed power and would refuse to part with it. Bharata as an ideal brother never sat on the throne. He put the wooden sandals (*Padukas*) of his eldest brother who was the legal heir to the throne and ruled the country for long twelve years. He regularly used to be in touch with him in the forest.

Similarly Lakshman, a truly loyal brother devoted, affectionate and highly educated, went leaving in the royal palace, a young wife Urmila. For no fault of hers she was denied of the company of her prince husband not for a short time but 12 long years ! May be it was not fair to her by Valmiki but who knows there must have been some reason behind the long separation. The subjects played their due role. They never hesitated to even criticise their King ! Even a washerman criticised Sita's stay with Ravana and Rama took it seriously and made arrangement for *Agni Pariksha* (Fire Test). Who, on earth would do it today ? Book like the *Ramayana* give us proper guidelines. "They (The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*) observed Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, gave us not merely enlightenment but also solace of mind. The *Ramayana* the *Mahabharata* Kalidasa's works : all these have given us

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The Mahabharata

The *Mahabhaata*, the greatest epic of India is considered and revered at par with the *Vedas*. No less an authority than Sri Aurobindo, the great modern saint wrote in his famous *Foundations of Indian Culture* : “The *Mahabharata* has been spoken of as a fifth *Veda*, it has been said of both (the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabhaata*) these poems that they are not only great poems but *Dharmashastras*, the body of a large religious and ethical and social and political teaching, and their effect and hold on the mind and life of the people have been so great that they have been described as the Bible of the Indian people”.

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture*)

No doubt, the *Mahabharata* is the most revered among the popular scriptures of India and that it is studied by all irrespective of caste and creed. It is a must for even war strategies and training in the art of politics. It is not only relevant and valid even today, the *Mahabharata*, gives main keys to war strategies, besides the deepest messages of Indian philosophy. The popularity of the *Mahabharata* cannot be questioned although there are great philosophical treatises in Indian literature with deeper and may be much more significant messages.

To be learned is one thing, to be practical is another. To be knowledgeable is one thing, to use that knowledge in practical life is another. Sri Aurobindo himself felt that the earlier philosophical works by ancient sages were in no way of any inferior quality. He noted that the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, being described as the Bible of India cannot be a quite an accurate analogy for the Bible of the Indian people contained also the *Veda* and *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and *Tantra* and *Dharmasastras*, not to speak of a large bulk of the religious poetry in the regional languages. The work of these epics was to popularise high philosophic and ethical ideas and cultural practice; it was to throw out prominently and with a telling relief and effect, in a frame of great poetry, and against the background of poetic story, and around significant personalities that they became abiding national memories and representative figures all that was the best in the soul and thought or true to the life or real to the creative imagination and ideal mind or characteristic and illuminative of the social ethical, political and religious culture of India".

(*Ibid*)

Sri Aurobindo's appreciation of the lofty ideals of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Puranas* cannot be questioned. There cannot be the slightest doubt about the moral and ethical values of these great spiritual treatises. But there were two big hurdles about these great works of the sages. First, they needed a deeply spiritual background and a special surrounding and atmosphere to understand them. To realise these philosophies would definitely be beyond the reach of the ordinary people. They were not written because they were transmitted only orally. They had to be memorised by and by only through hearing. As Max Mueller had described in detail that the scholars had to culture their memory sharply. That was possible only through imparting them to a restricted number of disciples. These ideas were too philosophical and full of mysticism. For that matter, everybody cannot have a receptive mind to receive these lofty thoughts, however rich they may be, to raise the conduct, characters and personalities of the listeners.

Secondly and more importantly, the general masses were not accessible for this learning. They found their door closed because only *Brahmin* students had the rare privilege, to pick up the lessons. The *acharya* could not afford to accommodate students *en masse* because he had to assume full responsibilities of their food and lodging. The *acharyas* never charged any fees in the *Tapvanas*.

So luckily when the *Ramayana* was composed by Valmiki and Vyasa composed the *Mahabharata*, they found the crux of the same philosophy in story form. They got interested in knowing the details. It was also a fact, that the presentation in both the epics was easier for the lay man to understand the main theme. They had lesser touch of mysticism. They were much more practical in their approach to the philosophy that preached almost the same ideas of renunciation which has been the theme of literature on Indian Spirituality.

THE AUTHOR

Maharshi Vyasa was the author of *Mahabharata* the great epic. It is from the *Mahabharata* that we get also the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. It would seem that Vyasa was so fast in his dictation that it was a problem to get an assistant to take it down. Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, affectionately and popularly known as Rajaji who besides being a national leader was also a great scholar, has been the author of the authentic version of the epic. He wrote, "Having conceived the *Mahabharata* he thought of the means of giving the sacred story to the world. He meditated on *Brahma*, the creator, who manifested himself before him. Vyasa saluted him with bowed head and folded hands and prayed :

'Lord I have conceived an excellent work, but cannot think of one who can take it down to my dictation.'

Brahma extolled Vyasa and said : O Sage, invoke Ganapati and beg him to be your amenuensis." Having said these words he disappeared. The sage Vyasa meditated on Ganapati who appeared before him. Vyasa received him with due respect and sought his aid : 'Lord Ganapati I shall dicatate the story

of the *Mahabharata* and I pray you to be graciously pleased to write it down."

Ganapati replied : "Very well. I shall do as you wish. But my pen must not stop while I am writing. So you must dictate without pause or hesitation. I can only write on this condition."

Vyasa agreed guarding himself, however with a counter stipulation. 'Be it so, but you must first grasp the meaning of what I dictate before you write it down.'

Ganapati smiled and agreed to the condition. Then the sage began to sing the story of the *Mahabharata*."

(Rajagopalachari, C : The *Mahabharata*, p. 17)

Who was this great author Vyasa ? According to the *Puranas* "Vyasa was by birth a fisherman. His father Parasara was born in a dog eating tribe. Many non-Dvijas (non *Brahmins*) have in the past attained *Brahmin* hood by their merit." This has been confirmed also by the *The Srimad Bhagavad Gita* which observed that castes developed according to the differentiation of *Gunas* (qualifications) and *Karma* (activities) disposition and temperament and inherited instincts or aptitudes. So Vyasa, one of the greatest sages of India, son of Parasara, also a fisherman, and whose mother Satyavati, also a fisherwoman, attained the status of a great sage, ranked above a *Brahmin* by dint of his enlightened knowledge. Not only that Vyasa was an enlightened sage, his father Parasara was one of the greatest sages of ancient India. His son Sukhdeva was, by far the greatest of all the sages ever born in ancient India. He was, according to Sri Krishna, the only person who could understand the inner meaning of the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, *Ahang betti*, *Sukho betti*, *Vyaso betti na betti ba*. Only I (Sri Krishna himself) have understood it. Sukhdev is the only seer who too has understood it. Vyasa (the author himself) has perhaps understood it or not.

In the *Mahabharata*, the greatest stress has been laid on human values, protest against injustice, purity of conduct, Truth and learning.

The crux of the philosophy of the Epic given in one place viz. the *Vana Parva* where in Yudhisthira has a dialogue with Dharma, in the disguise of a crane. Maharshi Vyasa summed up the entire philosophy in the form of questions and answers.

“The secret meaning of the *Vedas* is Truth; of Truth, Self control, freedom from all limitations. This is the sum of all scriptures.” (*Santi Parva*) How to gain it ? Through learning. The *Mahabharata* stated, “There is no sight equal to learning, no austerity equal to Truthfulness, no misery like passion, and no happiness equal to following the ideal of renunciation.” (*Santi Parva*). In the *Anusarana Parva* the *Mahabharata* noted “Purity of conduct is the greatest purity.”

REAL PURPOSE OF MAHABHARATA

The *Vedas* were recitations by sages and seers. They expressed through these hymns the enlightened knowledge, mainly on God. It was the same with the *Upanishads*. The cycle was going quite well from ear to ear. The whole thing had to be memorised. Only the *Guru* or *Acharya* or the preceptor was the custodian of the entire knowledge. The disciples were restricted to a limited number of students and were mostly *Brahmins*. The ordinary man had hardly any chance or access to this mine of divine knowledge. Besides the *Vedas* were also not so easy to comprehend as they needed vast knowledge as its background and an atmosphere of academic pursuit.

There was earnest desire by many to dive deep into the *Vedic* knowledge but they could not express anything. They had no voice in the teaching the scriptures or any education, higher in Indian philosophy. There were sages who had contact with the masses because of their intuition and contact. They too knew it was not easy a task to impart knowledge on the *Vedas* to the common man.

There was at least one great sage, enlightened and thoroughly well versed in the *Vedas*. His father too was a great saintly Scholar. His son Maharshi Veda Vyasa had compiled and edited the entire *Veda*. He was the first to gather together

all the hymns. He felt this mine of information on God-realisation must be shared with the masses of people. So he took up the challenge of writing down an epic depicting the thoughts, reflecting the inner realization of the earlier God-men in an easier manner. According to the *Cultural Heritage of India*, "Vyasa says that the *Mahabharata* was specially composed to broadcast the *Vedic* lore to the people at large, and that the four *Vedas* became complete with the fifth, namely the *Akhyana* or epic." This is the reason behind origin of the *Mahabharata*.

(See *The Cultural Heritage of India*, VI IV, p. 503)

The great epic is nothing but the reflections of the lofty ideas of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. Prof. Basham, analysing the origin of the great epic noted, "The *brahmins*, who regarded themselves as the interpreters of Hinduism, were able to rewrite the older texts to conform to their own vision of society, as is evident from Puranic literature, and was able to convert popular secular material, such as the two epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* into sacred literature." There has been slight departure from facts. They were not rewritten. Earlier texts were never available in writing. Even Max Mueller clearly explained how disciples picked up the *Vedic* hymns from mouth to mouth. They passed it on only orally. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* were the earliest among the written scriptures. Secondly it would be correct to say that the religious shape to society was given only by *Brahmins*. There was no caste system. The word could suitably be described as sages. Vyasa was not a *Brahmin*. He was a fisherman. Similarly Valmiki too was not a *Brahmin*. He was a hunter by profession. By dint of deep spiritual experiments they attained sagehood. The question of *Brahmins* rewriting the scriptures would not arise.

But Prof. Basham would be quite correct when he compared ideas of the *Vedas* with those of the *Mahabharata* to show their similarities. He observed, "The *Veda* says : "Cross the bridges hard to cross. Overcome anger by love, untruth by truth." The *Mahabharata* says, "The rules of Dharma or virtuous

conduct taught by the great seers, each of whom relied on his own illumination, are manifold. The highest among them all is self control" (*Santi Parva*).

Unfortunately, in our times, laments the eminent historian, 'the man of self control is regarded as a Weak Man' (also *Santi Parva*). It is for developing self-control that austerities and asceticism are practised but when self control is attained these rigorous practices are unnecessary. Insistence on discipline or self control avoids the two extremes of self indulgence and asceticism. Discipline does not mean either the starving of the senses or the indulgence of them".

(*Mahabharata*)

To be honest to author Vyasa, we must recall what he clearly said that he wanted to preach the ideas of the *Vedas*. He was the first to compile all the *Vedas* and divided them into four.

All the practical ideas have been depicted in the great epic. The whole arrangement besides being most artistic its presentation has been simply superb. Sri Aurobindo, while introducing the *Mahabharata* as an epic brilliantly analysed all the aspects of life. "All these things were brought together and disposed with artistic power and a telling effect in a poetic body given to traditions half legendary, half historic but cherished henceforth as deepest and most living truth and as a part of their religion by the people."

The whole epic has, no doubt been brought to the door steps of the masses of people through the original text in Sanskrit or translated versions in all the major languages of India. In India, the system of *Kathas* or religious discourses or as in the South, *Kalakshepam*, explaining the main texts by a section of priest like *Kathakas* is very popular. They are attached not only to the temples, even social bodies appoint *Kathakas* to preach religious sermons. They are a class by themselves. On the banks of the sacred rivers, holy pilgrim spots or even parks and public places religious organisations arrange these *Kathakas* to explain the inner meaning of the

epics to the ordinary masses. In some public bodies or Institutes of culture too learned scholars are invited to explain the difficult chapters of the epics. These *Katha Kathas*, specially in rural India, depicting the main characters of the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, made it easier for the people. They have been playing a great role in popularising these masterpieces and spreading spiritual education and culture even to the illiterate people who inspite of their non familiarity with the three R's are equally in some cases, more eager to listen to these spiritual discourses. These lecturers or *acharyas* or *Kathaks*, through this informal teaching play a vital role in moulding the thinking, building the characters and generating aesthetic and philosophical ideas in the minds of the ordinary people. They have been giving "To the illiterate some sufficient tincture of philosophy, ethics, social and political ideas, aesthetic emotion, poetry, fiction and romance." Even Sri Aurobindo who was slightly critical of describing these epics as Bible of India (some have even described the *Ramayana* as the Bible of Asia) also appreciates the easier philosophical approach by the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* when he admitted that these epics widened the horizon of audience to a bigger population.

Describing this special aspect of the two epics Sri Aurobindo described, "That which was for cultural classes contained in *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, shut into profound philosophical aphorism and treatise or inculcated in *Dharma Sashtras* and *Artha Sashtra*, was put here into creative and living figures, associated with familiar story and legend, fused into a vivid representation of life and thus made a real and living power that all could readily assimilate through the poetic world appealing at once to the soul and the imagination and the intelligence."

Of the two epics, while both command equal popularity, the *Ramayana* stressed on the importance of ethical values of life, whereas the *Mahabharata* presents a more practical aspect of strategies in politics and administration. Both convey the main messages of renunciation, social justice, victory of good

over evil and above all moral and ethical value judgments constituted common features of the epics.

Great scholars like Sri Aurobindo, Dr Radhakrishnan assign even deeper significance to the *Mahabharata* than mere depiction of characters. Chakravarty Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* presents in a more lucid style the entire story of the *Mahabharata* in the form of 107 stories. They are extremely popular and almost a household property with all lovers of Indian philosophy and culture. In his moving introduction to the *Mahabharata*, the learned philosopher politician—he made *Mahabharata* the guide of his life—noted rightly, “The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival but above all, it has for its core the *Gita* which is as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.”

(Chakravarty Rajagopalachari : *Mahabharata*)

A very unfortunate part of our educational system is that much is being taught in schools and colleges, may be too much, more than what a student can digest but very little attention is being paid to our own cultural heritage. Our students—they are much brighter than previous generations know very little about our own epics.

STRESS ON HUMAN VALUES

One of the basic reasons for lack of our present value judgment is the lack of proper background of our moral education. The Christian Missionary Schools and colleges have maintained at least a part of imparting religious education. In modern courses of teaching there is no place for, even introducing to the students and many of them are eager to learn our great epics. Even the most modern western countries this aspect of education is given proper attention. In socialist

countries too there is a great move—a happy sign no doubt—to preserve and present the quintessence of their rich cultural heritage. In this study of cultural heritage the foremost attention is needed for popularising the great Indian epics. The *Kathakas* or the monks apart, the teachers in schools and colleges (unfortunately many of them do not have the background themselves !) must familiarise these epics to the modern generation. Parents have a more important role. They pay very little attention to their children's education. Even the mothers are equally busy in the strain and stress of daily life. But this time, spent on moral value spreading as depicted in our epics, will be a good investment that will, in the long run bring better dividends.

Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, a very busy political leader, inspite of his heavy schedule felt this great need and took upon himself the task of spreading the message of the *Mahabharata*. C. Rajagopalachari, wrote, "In the moving history of our land, from time immemorial great minds have been formed and nourished and touched to heroic deeds by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. In most Indian homes, children formerly learnt these immortal stories as they learnt their mother tongue—at the mother's knee ; and the sweetness and sorrows of Sita and Draupadi, the heroic fortitude of Rama and Arjuna, and the loving fidelity of Lakshmana and Hanuman became the stuff of their young philosophy of life.

The growing complexity of life has changed the simple pattern of early home life. Still, there are few in our land who do not know the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, though the stories come to them so embroidered with the garish fancies of the *Kalakshapam* and the cinema as to retain but little of the dignity and approach to truth of Vyasa and Valmiki."

(Rajaji : *Mahabharata*)

WHY THE EPIC IS NAMED MAHABHARATA

The epic derived its name from the great king Bharata after whom the country was known as *Bharatvarsha*. It

centre round the descendents of that great figure. Bharata was a historic figure being the son of King Dushyanta and Shakuntala about whom Kalidasa has written the famous literary piece *Abhijnan Shakuntalam*. "Maha" means great and "Bharata" means the descendants of that famous king Bharata. Literally *Mahabharata* means Great India or the story of the great descendants of Bharata—the Kurus and the Pandavas. Sri Aurobindo noted, "The *Mahabharata* has been spoken as a fifth *Veda*, it has been said if both these poems (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) that they are not only great poems but *Dharmashastras*, the body of a large religious and ethical and social and political teaching, and their effect and hold on the mind and life of the people have been so great that they have been described as the Bible of the Indian people."

In his analysis of Indian literature, Sri Aurobindo assigned the highest importance to the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Sri Aurobindo felt, that the *Mahabharata* especially is not only the story of the Bharatas, the epic of an early event which had become a national tradition but on a vast scale the epic of the soul and religious and ethical mind and social and political ideals and culture and life of India. It is said popularly of it and with a certain measure of truth the whatever is in India is in the *Mahabharata*."

The *Mahabharata* represents the life and pulse of the whole of India. Again to quote Sri Aurobindo "The *Mahabharata* is the creation and expression not of a single individual mind but of the mind of a nation; it is poem itself written by a whole people." Strangely enough Sri Aurobindo's literary appreciation proved also physically true. The great epic has penetrated into the very heart and soul of all Indians. Even the illiterate rural folk will tell you the characters and story of the *Mahabharata*. Although the description of Sri Aurobindo of the *Mahabharata* reads like a poem itself,—it was from the bottom of his heart—there seem to be as exaggeration when the Saint *yogin* noted, "The whole (epic) poem has been built like a vast national temple unrolling

slowly its immense and complex idea from Chamber to Chamber crowded with significant groups and sculptures and inscriptions the grouped figures carved in divine or Semi divine proportions, a humanity aggrandised and half uplifted to superhumanity, and yet always true to the human motive and idea and feeling the strain of the real constantly raised by the tones of the ideal, the life of this world amply portrayed but subjected to the conscious influence and presence of the powers of the worlds behind it, and the whole unified by the long embodied procession of a consistent idea worked out in the wide steps of the poetic story."

Sri Aurobindo, to justify, the claim of the *Mahabharata* as an epic described all the qualities of an epic and substantiated the thesis that all of them were very much present in it. "As is needed in an epic narrative the conduct of the story is the main interest of the poem and it is carried through with an at once large and minute movement, wide and bold in the mass, striking and effective in detail, always simple, strong and epic in its style and pace. At the same time though supremely interesting in substance and vivid in the manner of the telling as a poetic story, it is something more—a significant tale *Itihasa*, representative throughout of the Central ideas and Ideals of Indian life and culture.

The leading motive is the Indian idea of the *Dharma*. Here the *Vedic* notion of the struggle between the godheads of truth and light and unity and the powers of darkness and division and falsehood is brought out from the spiritual and religious and internal into the outer intellectual ethical and vital plane".

The whole epic centres round the eternal conflict between the good and the evil and in fitness of things, show the triumph of Truth over untruth, just as against the unjust, right against the wrong. The highest thoughts of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedas* are reflected throughout specially in the portion out of which was culled the *Gita*. All the figures, about which details are given in a lucid style by Rajaji in his *Mahabharata* and who form the main continuous story have to

present subtle political and social ideas and institutions are similarly developed or illustrated with a high vividness and cleanness and space is found too for aesthetic and other suggestions connected with the life of the people. "All these things are interwoven into the epic narrative with remarkable skill and closeness."

The above has been an outstanding description of an epic, a classic of universal appeal and an important piece in the realm of world literature. Beyond doubt, the *Mahabharata* as also the *Ramayana*, judged from all angles of elements of epics, can claim as true epics.

There is not the slightest doubt that the *Mahabharata* represents the entire soul and thought and life of the entire people of India. No doubt a poetic mind would like to say, "the structural power, strong workmanship and method of disposition of the *Mahabharata* remind one of the art of the Indian builders the grandeur and boldness of outline and wealth of colour."

It is not an ordinary literary piece of literature or lore. It reflects the inner voice of India, already expressed earlier through the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* but in an easier story form with figures and individuals, with joy and suffering, smiles and tears of actual life. It is highly ethical and aesthetic.

Himself a great scholar in Greek and Latin, Sri Aurobindo has not left a chance to compare it with Greek literature. "As rich in freshness of life but immeasurably more profound and evolved in thought and substance than the Greek, as advanced in maturity, more vigorous and vital and young in strength than the Latin epic poetry, the Indian epic poems were fashioned to serve a greater and complete national and cultural function and that they should have been received and absorbed by both the high and the low, the cultured and masses and remained through centuries an intimate and formative part of the life of the whole nation is of itself the strongest possible evidence of the greatness and fineness of this ancient Indian Culture.

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture* p. 330-31)

Great men always think alike. Much earlier, Swami Vivekananda too compared this great Indian epic with Greek epics. In a famous talk in American, said Swamiji, "This epic is the most popular one in India and it exercises the same authority in India as Homer's poems did over the Greeks. As ages went on more and more matter was added to it, until it has become a huge book of about a hundred thousand couplets."

(*Swami Vivekananda, Complete works, Vol IV, p. 74*)

Swamiji described the *Mahabharata* before the American audience in a very simple style without giving the more mystic references to the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* mainly because of the unfamiliarity of the American audience with those high philosophical treatises. Otherwise there are great similarities in the treatment by both these great saints in describing and presenting a picture of the *Mahabharata* as a great epic.

THE MAIN STORY

The Kauravas and the Pandavas were close relations. They were first cousins with a common family background both sides being great grandchildren of King Santanu. Kauravas were hundred in number all being children of Dhritarastra. The Pandavas, being only five in number, were the sons of Pandu.

The Pandus leant much more towards moral justice. The eldest one Yudhisthira was an incarnation of Truth. He never uttered a lie in his whole life and even today if one has to describe a truthful man he is referred to as Yudhisthira, the truthful. Both sides had their training in archery from a common guru Dronacharya, the foremost of his time. All the children were well versed in military training. Arjuna, the third of the Pandavas was the best of the lot. As a wrestler, it was doubtful who between Duryodhana and Bhima was better. It was known as *Goda Yuddha*. In valour and ambition, Duryodhana, the eldest of the hundred sons of Dhritarastra was second to none. He wanted to grab the throne by fair or fowl means, by pretentious authority, force or by strategy.

The training, both military and academic—being over, Dhritarastra the father of the hundred children had put the ablest of the lot Yudhisthira on the throne. This caused great jealousy in the hearts of Dhritarastra's sons who got their cousins sent to Varanavata to attend a festival.

Sly Duryodhana got an inflammable palace of lac named *Jatugriha*. Besides lac, they also used hemp, resin and all such inflammable materials. The house was to be set on fire to kill the Pandavas. There was an honest man Vidura who knew the whole plot in advance. Vidura was step brother of Dhritarastra, so a nearer relation of the Kauravas. But he could not stand this act of the plot and treachery and wholesale murder. He told Yudhisthira about it and warned them to leave the temporary place at once. It was burnt to ashes. The Kurus were thrilled. They thought of usurping the throne. Duryodhana sat on the throne. Now that it was made clear that their lives were most unsafe, the Pandavas fled to the forest with their mother Kunti. They were roaming about like *Brahmins* in disguise. Meanwhile they heard about the *Swayambara Sabha* to be arranged for the daughter of King Dhruvada, of Panchala, Draupadi who was not only known for her beauty but also was most accomplished. The Pandavas too joined the *Swayambara Sabha*. By winning over all other princes present, Arjuna got Draupadi as his bride. After collecting alms as *Brahmins*, the five brothers used to report to Kunti who directed them to share everything equally. Arjuna told "mother see what we got today." As usual Kunti said share it equally among you five. "Religiously they followed" their mother and Draupadi accepted all the five brothers as her husbands.

Although they were roaming round as *Brahmins*, after the performance of Arjuna in Dhruvada King's court, the Kauravas had not the slightest doubt that the Pandavas were not dead. There cannot be a second archer like Arjuna and it must have been Arjuna who became the Champion. He rose from the seats of the *Brahmins* when the *Kshatriyas* had all failed. So for Duryodhana it was not only a great insult, for him it was a

hint for a coming mishap. And there it was. King Dhrupad came to know everything and felt proud that his daughter got wedded to Arjuna. He came forward to help the Pandavas to restore their lost kingdom.

Meanwhile a very ambitious King Jarasandha was determined to hold a sacrificial rite of hundred Kings. He had already got eighty six Kings imprisoned. He was waiting for the fourteen. Sri Krishna advised Bhim to challenge Jarasandha. A wrestling fight followed. It continued for a fortnight. Finally Jarasandha was defeated. The eighty six Kings were released. All of them became Yudhisthira's allies and offered to make him the emperor.

A *Rajasuya Yagna* was arranged. All the Kings including the Kauravas were invited. Yudhisthira was crowned as the emperor.

Yudhisthira had a weakness for dice gambling. He was challenged by Duryodhana whose main adviser was Shakuni, whose father died in the jail of the Kurus and he took a pledge to kill all the Kurus strategically. He was plotting a great revenge. Shakuni did all as a part of the revenge strategy.

Yudhisthira accepted Duryodhana's challenge of dice and staked one thing after another. The dice was an imitation one. So even a veteran player Yudhisthira lost each game. He lost all the stakes, the kingdom and even the wife Draupadi. Dushasan wanted to strip her in the open court, but she was a great worshipper of Sri Krishna who by his miraculous power saved her from public dishonour. The *Sari* became endless ! The last stake was the kingdom. Yudhisthira lost that too. As per contract he had to surrender the kingdom and leave the place and live in forest with family for twelve years.

Swami Vivekananda described that forest life so vividly : "They lived in the forests and mountains for twelve years. There they performed many deeds of virtue and valour and could go out now and then on a long round of pilgrimages, visiting many holy places. That part of the poem is very interesting and instructive, and various are the incidents, tales

and legends. There are in it beautiful and sublime stories of ancient India, religious and philosophical. Great sages came to see the (royal) brothers in their exile."

Here they met King Asvapati's daughter Savitri who knowing full well through Narada that the son of Dyumatsena a King, defeated by enemies was leading the life of a sage with his wife. He became blind. Satyavan was their only son. Savitri met Satyavan and knowing fully well all his ordeals wanted to marry him. The King warned specially because Narada told him astrologically that Satyavan was to die within a year. Savitri was so sure of her spiritual power and confidence on her power of chastity that she still insisted on marrying Satyavan. She compelled and extracted a boon from the God of Death Yama by her devotion to the husband. Even today Savitri is remembered everyday respectfully in all the Indian homes as an ideal wife. Her name is uttered next only to Sita.

A very interesting event took place in the forest. One day all the brothers felt thirsty. So Yudhisthira requested Nakula, his younger brother to fetch water from the nearby pond. He went quickly. As he was to fill the pitcher "Stop. Answer first my question, then drink water," asked a crane. Nakula did not care. He was so thirsty. He dropped dead. Yudhisthira sent the other brother Sahadeva to the pond. He saw his brother lying dead. But he proceeded towards the pond. The crane stopped him too. "Reply to my question first." Nakula was already dead. Now Sahadeva dropped dead. Similarly Arjuna and Bhima were also sent and they too met with similar fate. Finally Yudhisthira himself went to the pond. Most humbly he asked the crane to put the questions.

The crane was in fact a *Yaksha*. He started putting questions and Yudhisthira started replying. These question-reply portion conveyed the highest message of the *Mahabharata*. (*Vanaparba* is considered one of the most important chapters of the epic.)

The crane asked Yudhisthira who is higher than heaven ? Who is heavier than the Earth ? Who is faster than wind ? Whose number is more than the blades of grass ?

Yudhisthira calmly replied, "Father is **higher than the sky**. The mother is heavier than the Earth. The human mind is faster than wind. Thoughts outnumber the blades of grass in number".

The crane asked, "who does not shut his eyes while sleeping ? Who does not move after birth ? Who does not have a heart ? Who becomes great by himself ?"

Yudhisthira replied, "A fish does not shut its eyes while sleeping. An egg does not make any movement after birth. A stone does not have any heart. A river grows on its own speed."

Here are some more questions and replies :

"What makes the sun shine everyday ?

Yudhisthira replies, "The power of *Brahman*."

"What rescues man in danger ?"

"Courage is man's salvation in danger".

"By the study of which Science does man become wise ?"

"Not by studying any *Shastras* does a man become wise. It is by association with the great in wisdom that he gains wisdom."

"What is more nobly sustaining than the earth ?"

"The mother who brings up the children, she has become nobler."

"What is more blighted than withered straw ?

"A sorrow stricken heart."

"What befriends a traveller ?"

"Learning."

Who is the friend of one who stays at home ?

"The Wife."

"Who accompanies a man in death ?"

"*Dharma*. That alone accompanies the soul in its solitary journey after death."

"Which is the biggest vessel ?

"The Earth."

"What is happiness ?"

"Happiness is the result of good conduct."

"What is that abandoning which man will be loved by all."

"Pride—for abandoning that man will be loved by all."

"What is the loss which yields joy and not sorrow ?

"Anger—giving it up, we will no longer be subject to sorrow."

"What is that, by giving up which, man becomes rich ?

"Desire—getting rid of it man becomes wealthy."

"What makes one a real Brahmana ? Is it birth, good conduct or learning ? Answer decisively ?"

"Birth and learning do not make one a brahmana Good conduct alone does. However learned a person may be he will not be a Brahmana if he is a slave to bad habits. Even though he may be learned in the four Vedas, a man of bad conduct falls to a lower class."

"What is the greatest wonder in the world ?

"Every day, men see creatures depart to Yama's abode, and yet, those who remain, seek to live for ever. This verily is the greatest wonder."

These were some of the basic questions Yudhisthira succeeded in replying to all of them satisfactorily. The crane was happy. He revealed his own identity. He said he was a *Yaksha*, a demi god belonging to the tribe of Kubera, the God of Wealth. In fact he was Yudhisthira's father *Dharma*, God of Death, Yama, the wisest of all the Gods.

The most lucid description in the easiest style is given by Chakravarty Rajagopalachari in his *Mahabharata* in the chapter entitled The Enchanted Pool (Chapter XLI).

(Details have been given also by Swami Vivekananda and also Swami Prabhavananda's, Spiritual Heritage of India p. 90)

When he asked for boons Yudhisthira asked for getting the life of Nakula who was lying dead. Dharma was surprised because Nakula was Yudhisthira's step brother, son of Madri. Yudhisthira asked for his life because Kunti had at least one son surviving. Madri had lost all. Dharma was overwhelmed with joy and embraced his son. He got all the four brothers alive. While departing he blessed Yudhisthira by comforting him in his banishment. Only a few days were left for 12 years. After that the Pandavas were to live in disguise for one year. If found out anywhere they were to repeat the banishment for another full term of 12 years. They must not be recognised by any one during this period.

Then started the period of disguise. They took shelter in the kingdom of Virat. Yudhisthira took up the job of a *Brahmin* in the royal court with the task of advising him. His new name was Kanka. He gave company to the King in playing dice. Bhima took up the job of a cook with the new name Vallava. Arjuna took up the job of a royal music lady teacher with the name of Brihannala. Nakula took charge of the stable with the name Granthika. Sahadeva became Tantripala with the assignment of looking after the cows. Now came the turn of Draupadi. Poor princess she was never used to any hard work. She took up the job of a personal attendant to the Queen Sudesna with the name Sairindhri which means one who is expert in beauty parlour. They spent one year happily and peacefully.

The whole tenure of twelve years life in forest and one year's life in disguise was over. An errand was sent to Dhritarastra to return to the Pandavas their due share of the Kingdom. But Duryodhana said, "nothing doing. Not an inch of land without a war." So the eighteen-day war was fought at Kurukshetra. That description forms the main theme of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*.

Sri Krishna was neutral. Both sides pleaded to win him over. So it was decided that the next morning, whomsoever he saw first would be assisted by his army of mighty soldiers.

In the art of War strategy Sri Krishna was second to none. So the whole night, Yudhisthira sat by the side of his feet and Duryodhana by the side of the head thinking that Sri Krishan's eyes would fall on him the moment he opened his eyes in the morning. But he was again wrong in his judgment. When Sri Krishna opened his eyes in the morning he first saw Yudhisthira because he was sitting at his feet. Sri Krishna joined the Pandavas as the charioteer to Arjuna and as the friend and counsellor of the Pandavas. Duryodhana got his army of mighty soldiers.

The war has been described in *Gita* in detail. Almost all the soldiers were killed. Great warriors like Bhishma, Drona, Karna, Duryodhana and all his brothers and thousands of other heroes fell one by one in the battle.

AN ANALYSIS AND APPRECIATION

The significance of the *Mahabharata* would be explained by the events themselves. It was the story of the victory of the good over the evil. The very fact that even after winning the most dreadful battle the Pandavas did not care to enjoy the luxurious palace lives and left everything showed clearly that nobody bothered for temporal power. They wanted truth, enlightenment and peace.

The influence of the *Mahabharata* reached people beyond the boundaries of the country. As Swami Vivekananda told his American audience in 1900, "If you only knew how much it has influenced your own country even ! If you want to know the source of Emerson's inspiration it is this book *Gita* (From the *Mahabharata*). He went to see Carlyle, and Carlyle made him a present of the *Gita*, and that little book is responsible for the Concord Movement. All the broad movements in America, in one way or other, are indebted to the Concord Party."

(*Swami Vivekananda's Speech at the Shakespeare Club,
California, February 1, 1900*)

It is indeed "impossible for me to present the unending

array of the grand and majestic characters of the mighty heroes depicted by the genius and master mind of Vyasa."

Swami Vivekananda in his masterly and learned style himself summed up the message and event of the great epic. "The *Mahabharata*," observed the great Swami, depicted "The internal conflicts between righteousness and filial affection in the mind of the God-fearing, yet feeble, old blind King Dhritarastra ; the majestic character of the grand Sire Bhishma ; the noble and virtuous nature of the royal Yudhisthira, and of other, four brothers, as mighty in valour as in devotion and loyalty ; the peerless character of Krishna, unsurpassed in human wisdom ; and not less brilliant, the characters of the women the stately queen Gandhari, the loving mother Kunti, the ever devoted and all suffering Draupadi—these and the hundreds of other characters of this Epic and those of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are the two encyclopaedias of the ancient Aryan life and wisdom, portraying the ideal civilisation, which humanity has yet to aspire after.

(*Ibid*)

Among the Sanskrit literary critics Acharya Ananda Vardhana is supposed to be the greatest. In his analysis and appreciation of the *Mahabharata* he noted, the *Mahabharata* teaches man ultimately to renounce the vanity of earthly glories and attain *Dharma* (Truth and Righteousness), *Vairagya* (renunciation) *Santi* (Eternal peace) and *moksa* (Salvation). Vyasa himself remarked in his epic that he has sung the glory of the Lord and that his epic the *Narayana Katha* : The story of the Lord, thus clearly indicating what the message of his epic is ; for the story of the Pandavas is only an occasion, the purpose being to reveal the greatness of the Lord. Shun therefore, all worldliness and love the Lord."

(Ananda Vardhana : *Dhyanaloka*)

There cannot be the slightest doubt, even in modern eyes, inspite of additions of thousands of later great literary treatises, *Mahabharata's* position as a world classic. It remains the same and it will. In the words of a great authority Chakravarty

Rajagopalachari who himself has given a beautiful modern version of the epic in a very simple style, "the *Mahabharata* is a noble poem possessing in a supreme degree, the characteristics of a true epic and fateful movement, heroic characters and stately diction."

Who can question that the great Epic had moulded millions of characters and has left a permanent mark in the annals of human civilisation? In the learned words of Rajaji, the *Mahabharata* "belongs to the world not only to India. To the people of India, indeed, this epic has been an unfailing and perennial source of spiritual strength. Learnt at the mother's knee, with reverence and love, it has inspired great men to heroic deeds as well as enabled the humble to face their trials with fortitude and faith."

PLANNING OF THE EPIC

From the point of literary appreciation, the *Mahabharata*, unlike the *Ramayana*, observed literary critics, "may be regarded as a whole literature and not one poetic production." Even as a piece of philosophy, according to Dr. Radhakrishnan, the *Mahabharata* commanded greater importance.

The event took place much earlier. It was only legendary with episodes of the greatest war in India on the battle field of Kurukshetra. The historical documents suggest "This process continued for centuries till about the early part of the Christian era the Epic attained its present shape in a hundred thousand verses."

(*Gazetteer of India, Vol II, p. 179*)

Sri Aurobindo too has given greatest tribute to the presentation, description and the *Vedic* reflections as depicted by Maharshi Vyasa in the *Mahabharata*.

The whole epic is divided into eighteen chapters or *Parvas*.

Great scholars, including Chakravorthy Rajagopalachari tell us that "Indeed the *Mahabharata* has another name known among scholars—JAYA—which means victory, conveying the

moral herein indicated. *Jaya* is the name, by which the work is referred to, in the first invoking verse of the epic."

The *Mahabharata*, noted Rajaji, was composed many thousand years ago. But generations of gifted recitors have added to Vyasa's original, a great mass of material. All the floating literature that was thought to be worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical of nearly thirty centuries, found a place in it. In those days, when there was no printing, interpolation in a recognised classic seemed to correspond to inclusion in the national library.

In Prof. Basham's study also we find its earlier name as *Jaya*. Prof. Basham's study attempted to fix a date for composition of the *Mahabharata*. "The lay of the *Jaya* (Victory) was handed down orally for at least a thousand years after the battle it celebrates (c 900 BC) before becoming relatively fixed in writing as the *Mahabharata*, "Great Bharata (Battle)". A Shadowy Dvaipayana or Vyasa is recorded first to have sung of this terrible struggle of his own time. Vaisampayana later elaborated the epic in 24,000 verses and a 750 BC Lomaharsana and Ugrasravas are supposed to have recited the complete *Mahabharata* in 1,00,00 verses. On metrical and other grounds, however, the text constituted in the critical (Poona) Edition which may approximate to the manuscripts of the fourth century A.D. includes additions down to that century, with balancing nucleus of archaic verses producing an average date of composition not earlier than c 100 BC."

(Basham, A.L. : *A Cultural History of India*, p. 170)

This has been authenticated by documents available, which indicated that the epic passed through three principal stages of development before it assumed its present form. Literary and inscriptional evidence suggest that by A.D. 500 the *Mahabharata* had become more than an epic ; it was a sacred book and a religious discourse. The historians authoritatively record that the *Mahabharata* did not exist in the 4th century BC in its epic form ; the transformation of the original story into the present compilation took place over the long stretch of years between the 4th century BC and the 4th century A.D.

MAHABHARATA, THE EARLIEST HISTORY OF THE WORLD

The *Mahabharata*, according to some scholars was possibly “the earliest attempt in ancient India to write history. Its value as a source of political history has yet to be critically assessed, though scholars agree that the basis of the epic story has a foundation in facts. It would be of inestimable worth for reconstructing the social and cultural history of the period”

(*The Gazetteer of India, Vol II, p. XLII*)

The war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas took place at Kurukshetra and lasted for eighteen days. It is on record that in this war all the important kings in India took sides. Almost all the Kings and princes were killed in the battle. The Pandavas won and settled down at Hastinapur as their capital.

History also tells us that although the *Mahabharata* was composed at a much later period “there seems to be some truth in the story of this Great War, known as the *Bharata* War throughout the ages. It was looked upon as a great landmark in the history of ancient India which saw the end of one cycle and ushering in of another. Modern scholars, while generally agreeing about the historical character of the war, assign different dates to it and the most reasonable assumption is to place it at about 1,000 B.C.”

According to the *Puranas* after the Kurukshetra war, the Pandavas became the “Supreme political power in India.” But even though the Pandavas won the war they left the throne to the grandson of Arjuna whose name was Parikshita.

This is an important feature of the epic. If the Pandavas were not interested in ruling the country how did they get themselves in the biggest war of the contemporary period? The Pandavas were denied of their rightful claim over their share and the insolent Duryodhana told them “not an inch of land without a war.” He was confident of his victory. He had reasons to be confident. All the stalwarts in war strategies—Bhisma, Karna, neighbouring rulers were on his side. On

the other hand the Pandavas hardly had any allies. The only ally on the side of the Pandavas was the greatest strategist and the wisest person on earth Sri Krishna. Arjuna was good in war. But knowing fighting is one thing and knowing the art of strategy is another. The latter is the most important.

As in the *Ramayana*, so also in the *Mahabharata*, we find victory of justice over injustice, good over evil and righteousness over corrupt practices. So, historically the *Mahabharata* also proved the philosophical truism of the Mundaka Upanishad : *Satyameva jayate na nritam*—only Truth triumphs, not a lie.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The *Mahabharata* gives detailed description of existing socio-economic condition of prevalent days, besides the story of the royal battle. Students of human history and civilisation will find the reflection of socio-economic condition of the people of these days. To quote one of the most authentic scholars, "The *Mahabharata* discloses a rich civilisation and a highly evolved society which, though of an older world, strangely resembles the India of our own time, with the same values and ideals. India was divided into a number of independent kingdoms. Occasionally, one king, more distinguished or ambitious than the rest, would assume the title of emperor, securing the acquiescence of other royalties, and signalised it by a great sacrificial feast. The adherence was, generally voluntary. The assumption of imperial title conferred no overlordship. The emperor was only first among his peers. The art of war was highly developed and military prowess and skill were held in high esteem. We read in the *Mahabharata* of standardised phalanxes and of various tactical movements. There was an accepted code of honourable warfare, deviation from which met with reproof among *Kshatriyas*. The advent of the *Kali* age is marked by many breaches of these conventions in the Kurukshetra battle, on account of the bitterness of conflict, frustration and bereavements. Some of the most impressive passages in the epic centre round these breaches of *Dharma*."

NO CASTE SYSTEM IN MAHABHARATA

In some passages of *Rig Veda* and the *Mahabharata* there are clear cut references to "a casteless millenium of equality, plenty and piety." The era was described also as the golden age of *Satyayuga* when "there was only one caste of *Deva* (Gods) or *Brahmana*, when people had no claim to private property and women were not regarded as mere chattel, when crops were grown without toil and every one was pious and happy."

There are scores of instances where eminent sages like Parasara or even his son Maharsi Vyasa did not hesitate to marry fisherwomen. Both hailed from fishermen's family. Vyasa chose a fisher girl Satyavati to get married to King Santanu, the father of Bhishma and grandfather of Pandu and Dhritarastra. Pandu's five sons and Kuru's (Dhritarastra's) hundred sons, all were grandchildren of a fisherwoman, who fascinated King Santanu that he did not hesitate to deny the eldest son Bhishma, already ceremoniously declared the crown Prince of the kingdom. Bhishma was the son of Ganga, a goddess who vanished after leaving the eighth child Vishma (his original name was Devabrata, he was titled *Bhishma* which means a man of great promise).

So caste system did not exist at all during the *Mahabharata* period.

A man was judged by his qualities of head and heart. Learning was given highest respect. A learned man, from any social environment, was treated as a *brahmin*. Advisers and counsellors were chosen from those known for learning. Military training was imparted by experts like Dronacharya. Generals were chosen from among those known for valour. The royal family members themselves were experts in war strategies. People were kind and there was mutual respect for each other. Even enemies were treated well. Wars took place only after warnings. Nobody who was unarmed was attacked. There was a certain code of conduct even in war.

Spy system was there. Secrets were gathered by people of very high rank. For instance had Vidura (who was born of the servant maid of Ambalika, wife of Vichitra Virya, Pandu's father) not informed the Pandavas about the murder plot at wax House (*Jatugriha*), the Pandavas would have been killed.

INFLUENCE OF MAHABHARATA IN LITERATURE

Introducing the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Aldous Huxley described "The *Mahabharata* is said to be the longest (epic) poem in the world." The great epic has tremendously affected the life and literature of millions not only in India, but many parts of the world. It has deeply touched millions of hearts in their day to day events and performance of duties. It has the most tremendous effect in moulding the characters of millions of Indians for thousands of years. Deeply drenched in the spirit of renunciation, thousands left their hearth and homes and embraced monkhood. There are many instances where even kings left their thrones after a rule of as long as 26 years and became a saint. That was Yamunacharya, the spiritual preceptor of Ramanujacharya the great. Almost all Indian saints, specially of the Vaishnava faith, owed their entire career of spirituality to the *Mahabharata*. They were deeply influenced by the *Mahabharata*.

Even, today there is a popular saying among the masses of ordinary people, both literate and illiterate, rich and poor, that whatever is Bharata is in Bharata. It means whatever is in the *Mahabharata* is in India. That means the great epic covers the entire life style, socio-economic problems, their solutions, with smiles and tears, message of sacrifice and selfless service to humankind. The *Mahabharata* had touched the inner experiments of God realisations of almost all the immortal saints and sages of India. Many devotees abroad accepted the message of the *Mahabharata* as the guideline of their lives in search of peace. It definitely left its deepest mark on Indian literature too.

In India, says the *The Cultural heritage of India*, "Quite a large number of *Mahakavyas*, *Khanda Kavyas* and plays—based mostly on various episodes and few on the entire story

of the *Mahabharata*—were written in classical Sanskrit from the early centuries of the Christian era.”

In the sixth century A.D. Bharavi had written *Kiratarjuniya* based on the *Vanaparva* of the epic. It describes in 18 cantos Arjuna's propitiation of Lord Siva for divine weapons.

During the latter part of the seventh century, Magha, the great eminent scholar wrote *Sishupala Vadha*—slaying of Sisupal by Sri Krishna. That is also on the story of the *Mahabharata*, completed in 20 cantos.

The great scholar from Kashmir, Kashemendra in 1037 wrote the *Mahabharata Manjari*.

Anattabhata wrote *Bharata Champu* in twelve *Stavakas*, i.e. chapters.

Another eminent Sanskrit scholar Vasudeva, famous for his *Nalodaya*, wrote the *Yama Kavya*, the *Yudhishthira Vijaya* giving vividly the story of the *Mahabharata* “beginning with the hunting expedition of Pandu and ending in the coronation of Yudhishthira.”

Another scholar Amar Chandra Suri who was an eminent scholar known during the rule of Visaladeva of Gujarat in the first half of the thirteenth century A.D. “attempted a close adaptation of the complete *Mahabharata* in nineteen cantos in his *Bala Bharata*.”

Nitivarman who hailed from the eastern part of India during the eleventh century wrote *Yamaka Kavya* covering the story of Bhima's slaying Kichaka.

Vastupala who was a known author during the thirteenth century and was a minister of King Viradhavala of Dholka, wrote on the friendship of Krishna and Arjuna and Arjuna's marriage with Subhadra in sixteen cantos in his famous *Nara Narayananda*.

Bhasa wrote a number of important plays covering stories of *Mahabharata* during the third century A.D. At least six of his plays are devoted to *Mahabharata* stories. *Pancharatra* describes the robbing of Virata's cows by the *Kauravas*.

Although the story was borrowed from the *Mahabharata* the details vary. Bhasa also wrote the play *Duta Ghatakkacha* describing the story of delivery of message by *Ghatakkacha* to the Kauravas who were celebrating over the death of Abhimanyu. The message was that "the latter's death would be avenged by Arjuna. Bhasa's *Duta Vakya*, deals with Krishna's message to Duryodhana demanding a half of the kingdom for the Pandavas. Bhasa's *Urubhanga* describes the fight between Bhima and Duryodhana in which the latter's thigh was broken by Bhima striking with his massive club (*gada*). The *Karnabhara* deals with Indra's taking away the magic ear ring of Karna after approaching him in the guise of a *Brahmana*."

The greatest literary piece of the age and for ages to come is Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntala*, on the story of Dusyanta and Sakuntala as narrated in the *Mahabharata*. There is not the slightest doubt that, "this work has universally been acclaimed as one of the brightest gems in world literature."

Kulasekhara Varman, a king of Kerala of the ninth century A.D. wrote himself two *Mahabharata* plays—*Subhadra Dhananjaya* and the *Tapati Samvarana*. The *Mukuta-taditaka* ascribed to Bana by Bhoja was also written on the story of the *Mahabharata*.

Both the Jaina and Buddhist literature had been greatly influenced by the *Mahabharata*.

A large number of *Mahabharatas* have been written in the major Indian languages. King Naranarayan of Cooch Behar got the *Mahabharata* translated into Assamese by Rama Saraswati during the sixteenth century A.D. who wrote a number of books in Assamese based on the different characters of the *Mahabharata*.

Kabindra Parameswara translated the epic into Bengali during the same century. Happily, this was done at the initiative and financial assistance of Paragal Khan, a muslim official of Chittagong. It is known as *Pandava Vijaya*. The most popular version of the *Mahabharata* in Bengali is written by Kasiram

Das in the seventeenth century. It is recited in every house in Bengal. Kasiram wrote upto *Vanaparva*, then died suddenly and it had to be completed by his nephew. There is a popular couplet, known throughout Bengal which says the story of the *Mahabharata* is like nectar. He who listens to it is the luckiest of persons.

Maharaja of Burdwan and Kaliprasanna Sinha also got the *Mahabharata* translated into Bengali. They were however in prose form. Eminent playwrights like Girish Ghosh also wrote plays on different characters of the *Mahabharata*—*Abhimanyu Badh* (1881 A.D.) *Pandaver Ajnatavas* (1882 A.D.) and *Pandava Gauraba* (1900) are only a few to mention. Tagore's *Chitrangada* (1892) an interlocutory dance drama, derived all characters from the *Mahabharata*.

In Gujarat, Nakara translated the epic in 1560 A.D.

The Hindi version of the epic came out in 1670 by Sabal Singh Chauhan. Sur Das, the blind poet wrote, besides many songs also a story on Nala Damayanti based on the *Mahabharata* episode.

The Kannada version of the epic, translated by Pampa I was as early as in 902 A.D. The book *Vikramarjuna Vijaya* is equally popular as *Pampa Bharata* or *Samasta Bharata*. "The work is a masterly abridgement of the original work and maintain a high degree in narration, characterisation and poetry." It however, gives the Jaina version of the *Mahabharata*.

In Malayalam, Ezhuthackan, the author of *Adhyatma Ramayana* in his mother tongue, also composed an abridged version of the *Mahabharata*.

Mukteswara wrote the Marathi version of the *Mahabharata* (also *Ramayana*). That is considered by literary scholars as "a product of ripe learning and long experience." It was written in 1650 A.D. The outstanding book in Marathi on the epic, however, is *Pandava Pratapa* by Sridhara who also wrote *Rama-Vijaya*.

Sarala Das translated the epic in Oriya, wrote the *Mahabharata* in the 14th century A.D. Strangely enough this lady was "an illiterate cultivator absolutely ignorant of Sanskrit." She must have depended only on the popular traditional story, as preached from mouth to mouth.

In Tamil, the *Mahabharata* was translated by *Perundevanar* in the tenth century A.D. A very important and faithful translation of the epic has come out in prose by M.V. Ramanujachariar. C. Rajagopalachari's translated version of the *Mahabharata*—*Viyasar Virundu* is a popular treatise on the *Mahabharata*. This work has also been translated into English. Subramanya Bharati, the noted Tamil poet and a veteran freedom fighter, deeply religious by temperament, his *Panjaliyin Sargam* is an important work on a story from the *Mahabharata*.

Nannaya translated the *Mahabharata* into Telugu in the eleventh century A.D. Although the style was elegant, the work was not complete. Tirupati Sastri's play on the *Mahabharata* are quite interesting.

Not only in regional languages, the most popular medium of publicity, that is film has also rendered many stories from the *Mahabharata* on the screen. They have a universal appeal.

Some of the dramas on the theme of the *Mahabharata* in vernacular languages pleading for justice against oppression or torture played important roles even in the freedom movement in India. One glaring instance is *Karnajuna* by Manmatha Roy in Bengali, which was nothing but a protest by Indians against the oppressions during the British rule. Needless to say it was immediately banned. Its role in raising public opinion for a strong moral character on Truth and justice even among the illiterate poor rural population can be noticed even today.

The *Mahabharata* teaches mankind to be self sufficient and stand on one's legs. In *Santiparva*, the epic says, "consider human endeavour greater than dependence on fate." One must make an effort to stand against all odds in life.

And magnificent characters—Bhisma, the man who had kept his life long promise never to sit on the throne to which, he as the crown prince, had every right to sit but for his promise to his father whose wish to fulfil his desire to marry the beautiful Satyawati who insisted on her child's right on the throne as a part of contract for the wedding he kept although as a strong popular figure he could stake his claim anytime he liked. And Karna? He too as the eldest son of Kunti had every right to it. As a great general, a great philanthropist and noted for valour and war strategies, a man who could even offer his own son to Dharma who tested him as he was making gifts to so many has hardly any parallel. Dronacharya was a great teacher in the art of military training. Both sides were his disciples but in his judgment he was loyal to the ruling King Duryodhana.

About code of conduct, till today one has to find out a second book for a proper guideline. How one should behave with others? In the *Santiparva* the *Mahabharata* says, "treat others as thou would thyself be treated." (167-9)

In the *Anusasana Parva* it says, "Do nothing to thy neighbour which hereafter thou would'st not have thy neighbour do to thee."

One must be kind hearted. "Alms giving is the way to fame, right conduct is the way to happiness. The best of gains is the gaining of health, and the best of happiness is contentment" (*Vana Parva*, 318-70). It insists "There is no greater virtue than kindness. They who have their minds under control never come to grief. Friendship with the holy never ages." (*Vana Parva*).

Ego, vanity are eroding mind everyday. "He who gives up vanity is loved by all. He who gives up greed becomes happy." (*Vana Parva*).

Man must always worship God with devotion. This is the greatest Truth. The *Anusasana Parva* and the *Santi Parva*, both truly give the secret to strength of mind, how to acquire it and conserve. That will lead to the path of bringing good to all. That is through service. "Service to Man is service to God."

In the *Santi Parva*, the *Mahabharata* says, "He who is a friend of others and by his word, thought and deed is continually engrossed in doing good to others knows the meaning of Dharma." The only way to peace is selfless service. "Kindness is desiring happiness for all. Straight forwardness is mental poise. Holy is he who is kind to all. Wicked is he who is cruel." (*Vana Parva*). This is the key to World Peace.

Quite a large number of saintly scholars and learned men have brought out descriptions, analyses and modern versions of the *Mahabharata*. Perhaps the most detailed one is the critical Edition of the *Mahabharata* brought out by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona.

Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works (Vol IV)* includes two long detailed informative and analytical chapters on the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. He specially mentions the impact of the quintessence of the *Mahabharata* as depicted in the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* on Emerson who had got a copy of the Sacred book from Carlyle. The great Swami told the intellectual gathering how the ideas of the *Mahabharata* on Emerson reshaped the thinking of the American people. This was really an absolutely new information.

Sri Aurobindo, another modern great saint of India studied in depth, the two great epics, *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in his authentic treatise entitled, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*. There, Sri Aurobindo analyses, in his typically scholarly style, how a continuity in thought is being well preserved among the people of India right from the *Vedic* period to the modern days through Maharshi Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo describe at length the quality and elements of the Epics and both justify by reasons of conviction how these two great masterpieces fall into the categories of the Epics. Both compare *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* with Epics in Greek and Latin, specially the Epic by Homer. Both convincingly observe that these two great epics will continue to influence the minds and characters of the people of India.

Prof. A.L. Basham in his famous *Cultural History of India* deal in detail the relevance of the two giant epics. More details are given in his chapter on Classical Literature of India.

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan has done a monumental treatise by publishing Chakravarty Rajagopalachari's work which has reached at least a million houses because of its lucidity in style and modernity in approach. Rajaji maintains convincingly how the problem discussed in the *Mahabharata* reflect even those of today's.

Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester have done some detailed research. These two devoted spiritual figures and learned scholars have presented to the world, specially the western readers, the deep and lofty, ideas right from the *Vedic* period to the days of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. They have written a number of books but special mention must be made of their three books—*The Spiritual Heritage of India*, the *Upanishads* and the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*. Both have taken the *Vedas* as the main scriptures. They have in the first mentioned book devoted two sections on the two Indian Epics, describing both the books as “auxiliary”. In the third treatise on *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, a very useful introduction has been added by the eminent philosopher scholar Aldous Huxley. It is indeed a thought provoking introduction to the scripture. He has specially dealt with the crying need of the day—world Peace—and the role of the great Indian Epic the *Mahabharata*.

The roving learned monk, Swami Ranganathananda must have addressed a few thousand learned gatherings where he explained in the minutest detail of the two great epics. His analysis of the spiritual ideas interspersed with modern technology of Science and discoveries and the need of those ancient ideas connecting the continuing thread with modernity are simply superb. It is indeed a very happy augury that the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan at last has been able to acquire some of the learned monk's new and latest interpretations of ancient scriptures, specially *Srimad Bagavad Gita* from the *Mahabharata*. They have recently brought out Swami Ranganathananda's *Eternal Values in a Changing Society* fruitfully. The book itself has eternal value.

DYNAMIC CULTURE OF INDIA REFLECTED

Dr. Radhakrishnan opined that the religion accepted by the *Mahabharata* has been the *Vedic* one, which carried its past into a greater future. Through the hymns of the *Vedas*, the ideas of justice were preached. The same ideas have been presented in the form of story in the *Mahabharata*. It is a practical treatise. One must overcome evil by love ; but when one fails to do it, justice has to be gained by force. "That is what the *Mahabharata* says *Sastrad api Sastrad api*, either by means of a message of love or by means of weapons. That is the guiding spirit of India's policy of peace. *Mahabharata* pleads for peace through peaceful negotiation but when it fails, one need not hesitate taking to weapons.

According to Radhakrishnan's sixty years study of the epic, "The *Mahabharata* is a perceptive record of a great period of India's history. We cannot say that this is the work of a single author. The great Vyasa himself mentions five direct pupils. It has passed through different stages marked by the names : *Jaya*, *Bharata* and *Mahabharata*. There are many editions, manuscripts, translations in different languages."

A marathon work has been done on the *Mahabharata* constantly for sixty years by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona (1917) who published the first edition of the *Mahabharata* in 1933. The whole study in depth is a critical appreciation of the great epic.

The result of the research is fruitful. In 1966 the last volume was completed. So the whole project took just thirty three years, "The *Mahabharata* is not merely a historic work but it reflects the dynamic culture of India."

Like Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan also observed "It is said that what is found here may be found elsewhere but what is not found here cannot be found elsewhere. The poetic imaginative and questing spirit, the deeper thoughts and emotions, not easy sentiments, find expression in this great epic. We came across characters, varied and many, who have entered into the bloodstream of our history. They are known also in Indo-China, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and other places."

(Radhakrishna, S : *Speeches and Writings*, p. 149)

MESSAGE OF PEACE

In his brilliant analysis of the *Mahabharata* Dr. Radhakrishnan happily noted, "Though the *Mahabharata* deals with the selfishness of princes, indifference of classes, wars and threats of war, ends (finally) with an invocation of peace." Invincibility of gentleness is insisted on, all through the *Mahabharata*.

The *Mahabharata* insisted on integrity. The message of the *Mahabharata* has been universal. It insists on the fundamental basic principle of social justice and truth. It exhorted "whatever you sow that you will also reap. Wrong doing is punished sooner or later in unhappiness and failure. Right action is rewarded in well-being and success. Intelligence, goodness, wisdom and integrity are to be practised. Ignorance, dishonesty, avarice and fraud are to be avoided. We should reject the temptation to be dishonest and unscrupulous. To believe, that it is necessary on occasions to be less than honest, is false."

The *Mahabharata's* main message is clear cut. "A life of discipline, of *Dharma* is exalted. A lawless society, cannot long survive. The ultimate is Immutable reality and Absolute Love." These lessons are deeply instilled in our minds by the incidents and episodes of the *Mahabharata*.

As Dr. Radhakrishnan summed up, "If India possesses a fundamental unity far more profound than what her geographical isolation or political history suggests, it is due to the influence of this great epic, The *Mahabharata*. "The unity transcends diversities of race, colour, language and sect."

The highest teaching of the *Mahabharata* has universal appeal *jivo jivasya jivanam*, a life lives on life. The *Mahabharata* repeatedly exhorted : we should try to reduce the opportunities for the use of force *yatnad alpatara bhavet*. I must try to reduce the opportunities for the use of force. The *Mahabharata* has been meant for the strong. It has not said "we should abolish the use of force altogether."

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9

Tirukkural

Tirukkural is considered to be the fifth *Veda* of Indian life. One of the most learned treatises in Indian languages, *Tirukkural* is originally written in Tamil.

There is no subject on earth which has not been dealt with in this great epic. The word *Tirukkural* literally means : *Thiru* – sacred and *Kural*—poem. The whole treatise is composed in poem. It is a “treasure house of worldly knowledge, ethical guidance and spiritual wisdom.”

The Tamil language is the most ancient of all the Indian languages including Sanskrit. The great scholar Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was convinced about it. It stands “absolutely unique among world’s languages for length and continuity of life”. The most important characteristic of the language is that “it is at once a classical and a modern language with a humanistic tradition. The most learned scholar, who is also considered as great saint Thiruvalluvar is the author of this great treatise. No doubt the scholar President of India described his contribution in most respectful expression. Dr. Zakir Hussain observed, “In the firmament Tamil literature, Thiruvalluvar shines forth as the glorious sun. His comprehensive treatise of life, composed in a language which still lives on the lips of living men and women, has taken into

its warp and woof so many threads of Tamil culture that whoever cares to understand it holds in his hand a key to the hearts and minds of the Tamils”.

No doubt *Tirukkural* commands the status of a holy scripture. “I personally after thoroughly reading it time and again, am convinced that we may describe it as the fifth Indian *Veda*.”

Strangely enough through the passage of times all major religions of India claim it as their own. In its contents and text it reflects the best of all religions. “It has been claimed as their own by Jains and Buddhists, Saivites and Vaishnavites and others.”

Among all the Tamil books it is the most widely published and useful book, translated in the largest number of languages, extensively quoted and often quoted even today.

THE AUTHOR

Very little is known about the author of the great Tamil classic. Thiruvalluvar's dates too are controversial. Some say he wrote it in the beginning of the fourth century A.D. Some again, most authoritatively, maintain the poet wrote it in the first century B.C. That included even the learned translator A. Chakravarty who painstakingly not only rendered the whole treatise into English and opened the gate of knowledge to the whole world but he had added brilliant connotations and interpretations.

Thiruvalluvar, a saintly poet was respected equally by the intellectual as well as the layman. He definitely occupies an immortal place among the saints and scholars.

Details about his birth, early age are not known. No authentic literature is also available on his life. Whatever is gathered is only from tradition which says that he was an outcaste by birth. While some think that he was a weaver by caste, others suggest that he must have been a *Vellala*. The birthplace of Thiruvalluvar has again been a matter of equal controversy. According to tradition Thiruvalluvar hailed

from Mylapore, a suburb of the city of Madras and once known to have been a Jain Centre.

Again there are reasons to believe, as held by some equally learned scholars who maintain on the strength on a stanza occurring in *Thiruvalluva—malai* (to be exact stanza 21) that it was Madurai. This city also was a stronghold of Jainism from the fifth to seventh centuries A.D.

The religion of Thiruvalluvar has also been a favourite topic of discussion among scholars. But that he was a Jain has been admitted. Prof. S. Vaiyapuri Pillai assigned him to the sixth century A.D. An eminent European Missionary Scholar who translated the first two parts of his immortal work *Kural* into Latin, noted that, the prefix *Thiru* in the name of Thiruvalluvar signified divine in the sense in which we say the Divine Plato". Who does not know that the pride of place among the Tamil Kings go to the Pandyan Kings who had set up a Tamil Academy (Sangam) in their capital city of Madurai patronised scholars with sufficient gifts. Thiruvalluvar, who was acknowledged as an eminent poet, specially for his masterpiece *Kural*, submitted his work for the approval of this academy and secured its approbation after answering searching questions put to him by the learned critics. It must be recalled with pleasant pride that this period was called the *Sangam Age* of Tamil Literature.

What does this great work by Thiruvalluvar—*Tirukkural* describe? What are the sacred things about it? Why is it described as the "sacred poem"?

Every Indian must know about its contents. The great book—in verses—is code of morals expressed in poetical aphorisms. Every noteworthy poet who came after him has deemed it a privilege to incorporate in his poems the luminous ideas and lucid expressions of this sacred book. The Buddhists and Jains, the Saivites and Vaishnavites vied with one another in adoring it as their scripture. This unique feature has been responsible for its being called *Podumarai* (common scripture) and *Tamil Marai* (Tamil scripture).

Thiruvalluvar's this great work consists of three books, the first book treating the *dharma* or *aram*, the second, of *artha* or *porul* and the third of the *Nama* or *inbam*. There are 37 Chapters in the first book, the first four called *payiram* or prefatory matter, the next twenty about *ill aram* —*grihastha ashrama*—and the next thirteen about *turavaram* or *sanyas ashrama*.

The second book on *porul* contains 70 chapters, the first twenty five, dealing with Kings, their duties, the succeeding 32 Chapters with the rest of the constituent elements of a State and the next 13, with miscellaneous matters. The third book on *inbam* contains twenty five chapters, the first seven being on premarital love or *Kalavu*, and the next eighteen on marital love. In all, there are 133 chapters in the entire book.

The Saint poet made humanity and love the cementing force of society. "The utter simplicity of his language, his crystal clear utterances, precise and forceful, his brevity, his choice diction, no less his inwardness, his learning, culture, and wisdom, his catholicity and eclecticism, his gentle humour and wholesome counsel have made him an object of veneration for all time and his book is considered the *Veda* of the Tamils." Rev. Dr. G.V. Pope, who has translated *Tirukkural* into English, observed, "I have felt sometimes as if there must be a blessing in store for a people that delight utterly in compositions thus remarkably expressive of a hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Dr. Albert Schweitzer appreciated *Tirukkural* for its wealth of maxims and remarked : "There hardly exists in the literature of the world a book which contains such lofty maxims".

The book became so popular that the author as well as his work have earned the admiration and reverence of all ages, all sects and all religions. It has been translated into almost all the important languages of Europe and India.

The book had been reprinted innumerable times. The entire book like the Indian Classic literature has international appeal. It is not restricted to Tamil Nadu, India or Asian

countries. For instance *Tirukkural* starts with an invocation with universal appeal :

From A evolves the alphabet
And from the Primal Lord the World.....
There is no cure for care
Save at the feet of Him beyond compare.

Or in another piece on *Dharma* it observes :

Be pure in mind
That is the whole of *Dharma*
The rest is empty show.

Tirukkural left a deep imprint in the life style of the people of India in general and the South in particular. The Saint Thiruvalluvar repeatedly insisted in this epic that one must lead a simple life. 'Plain living and high thinking', which had been key to lead a happy life in ancient India and which has been stressed upon by almost all saints in their immortal messages has been the core of the message to the ordinary householder. It has been reflected deeply in the life style of the saintly and pure hearted specially in the South. Thiruvalluvar wrote "Think not thoughts that dwarf or depress the heart".

Again he said, "What (even) you learn, learn faultlessly ; having learnt it, live it firmly."

There are 1,330 couplets in all. In all these *slokas* the themes are of universal appeal. The style of writing is masterly, "even where the theme is commonplace, the treatment is artistic and the play of sentiments, image and sound, has a perennial interest.

It is in fitness of things that the Annamalai University, Chidambaram introduced a Chair in *Tirukkural* on September 8, 1968. The President of Indian Union inaugurated it.

RELEVANCE OF TIRUKKURAL

Tirukkural assigns the highest priority to agriculture in our country. It noted, "However wide they roam about in search of wealth, for their food they have to follow the tiller of the

soil since he is the foundation of the world organisation" and agriculture is certainly the best of occupations.

(Chakravarty, A. : *Tirukkural*, 1953, p. 498)

The Saint author Tiruvalluvar reminds us, "Since the cultivator supports all those who out of fear for strenuous work seek other means of livelihood, the agriculturist is the linchpin of the whole social chariot". In the social set up a high position was assigned to the profession of agriculture. According to *Tirukkural*, "the life of the agriculturist is life par excellence. All others have to live by following the agriculturist, praising him in order to get food from him".

It seems even the idea of 'grow more food' campaign was not unknown during those days. There was a word of encouragement for the poor cultivator even from the said philosopher who could not afford to overlook the importance of increasing crop production. "Those who cultivate their land and raise a bumper crop of waving ears of corn will see that many lands are brought under the control of their sovereign".

It is indeed amazing to note that the philosopher writer even tried to enthuse the tillers of the soil with a spirit of self reliance. "Those who are engaged in ploughing their field and producing their food will never be in a position to beg others for food. But on the other hand they will generously give to those who beg of them".

(*Tirukkural*, Sloka 1034)

Even in modern days can we vouchsafe that we have tried our best to instil a spirit of self-reliance in tillers of land in the same way ?

In another *Sloka*, the philosopher emphasised the importance of initiative. "When the tiller of the soil remains idle with folded hands, when there is no food for all who are eager to have it. Now is there security for those who renounce." Is it not really a most practical view of life as seen by the Saint who himself had left everything ?

And, what a wide coverage of ideas and ideals ! He had not left out even the minutest details about everything.

Tirukkural tells you how manure is more important than even ploughing. "Supplying manure to the lands is better than ploughing it, and when the crop is raised the weeds must be well removed and the field must be supplied with sufficient water and guarding the field is more important than watering it."

(Chakravarty A. : *Tirukkural*, op. cit)

A neglected wife is always in an angry mood. Similarly a land which is left uncared for hardly yields any harvest. *Tirukkural* observed, "If the owner of the land does not personally supervise and do the needful the land will sulk and non-co-operate with him like the neglected wife in an angry mood !" There could have hardly been a better simile. In another verse the Saint noted, "If a man remains idle thinking I am impoverished and hence I cannot do anything, then the good earth like a kindly mate will laugh at him with contempt".

Can there be a better challenge to the tillers of the land than a spirit of healthy rivalry among themselves to grow more crops ? It is really most fascinating to recite these poems today. Composed more than 2000 years ago they seem to be as fresh as works of only yesterday. Yet we have not only neglected the verses, we have also kept the tillers of the land in the background for centuries and even in free India we have hardly taken note of the sage's words of wisdom.

It has been most aptly observed "The *Kural* is no doubt an ancient work but like the Sun and the Moon the stars and hills, it is ever fresh. Its reverent message of love and truth is as relevant today as it was when it was written. The catholicity and humanism of Valluvar can alone save the world which is today standing on the brink of a precipice. He proclaimed : 'He alone lives who knows that he is one with all. The rest have their place among the dead',

When law courts were first instituted in India, the judges and lawyers used to cite the *Tirukkural* as an authority. It was held sacred and used in administering oaths to witnesses in courts.

The saint poet observed :

Of what avail is perfect goodness if it cannot do

Pleasing things even to those who have pained.

True modesty is the feat of evil deeds ;

All other modesty is simply the bashfulness of virtuous
maids

There are two looks in the dyed eyes

Of this fair one

One causes pain, and the other is the cure thereof.

(From translation by John Lazarus)

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10

Jainism and Mahavira

Jainism is indisputedly the most ancient religion of India. *Jain* is a word which is derived from the original Sanskrit root *Ji* which means to conquer. So a *Jain* is one "who believes in conquering the flesh in order to attain that supreme purity which leads to infinite knowledge, infinite happiness, and infinite power."

It is a wrong notion to attribute its foundation to Bhagwan Mahavira or Vardhaman. Jainism was first preached and practised long before the *Rig Veda* period. A series of *Tirthankaras* or greatly enlightened wandering monks founded the faith. *Tirthankara* means an enlightened great spiritual path finder who appeared after a cycle of four to five hundred years to enlighten mankind about divine knowledge. There were altogether twenty four of such great divine personalities who preached Jainism. Rasabha is supposed to be the original founder of the faith who uttered divine truth. He preached his message of Jainism before the utterances of the *Rig Veda*. The story of his life has been told in two of the *Puranas*, the *Visnu Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana*. He has been described as a seer with great spiritual attainments.

Bhagwan Mahavira was the twentieth fourth or the last of the *Tirthankaras* immediately after Parsanath, or Parash Nath, the twenty third of the *Tirthankaras*. He was not only a great self realised divine soul, he was also a great organiser. It was this great seer who gave the whole faith a proper disciplined shape, form and freshness of outlook to man and the earthly things in its modern scientific and systematic form. He was that way the real founder of Jainism in its latest style and philosophic approach. It has been internationally defined as "a non-Brahminical Indian Religion with doctrines like those of Buddhism". The crux of the whole religion as preached and universally accepted by one and all, irrespective of their own religious different faiths is *Ahimsa paramo dharma*. Non violence is the greatest virtue. This is applicable and most relevant to world peace.

EARLY LIFE

Prince Vardhamana was born over two thousand five hundred years ago in a royal family. House holder's life did not attract him. So at the age of thirty he left the royal palace in search of Truth. He became an ardent ascetic. His penance was proverbial. It was so deep that he forgot to eat and sleep for months.

Born in the latter part of the sixth century B.C. Vardhamana hailed from a *Kshatriya* family settled in a small principality near Vaisali, the modern village Basrah which is twenty miles away from Patna or ancient Pataliputra. He was married and also, like the Buddha had a child (daughter).

Vardhamana, right from his early childhood had an aptitude for exploring the real Truth. He possessed "a reflective and inquiring mind".

Just like the Buddha he left the royal palace, his young beautiful wife and the child.

His main protest, although spiritually but very vehemently, was against violence. He was convinced that violence would lead to self alienation and destruction. He emphatically felt that non-violence would be supreme phase of self-realisation

or Samadhi. He felt this was the great Truth in God-realisation. "His life embodied this Truth that rendered all testimonies of his faith redundant. He chose to launch upon a course of severe of austerities."

The Saint himself practised the severest austerity for more than twelve years. His disciples followed him and till now perform austerity by abstaining from rich and ample diet. *Nirvana* would be the highest form of austerity. Even in modern age, only recently, one lady nun practised austerity without touching even water for weeks, what to speak of food and finally died—what has been described by the followers of the faith as *Nirvana*.

The Saint warned against any pride or vanity in the name of austerity. "He detected the germ of vanity in penances meant for deluding the people around. Penance that are *Tamasika* or of a dark origin (outer show, vanity or ego) always invoked his wrath".

Similarly, Lord Mahavira cautioned that "austerity that causes injury to others and provoke self pity are austerities (only) in name. A close observation will reveal the inherent violence. He chose to treat his path alone and also admitted into his fold like a *Tirthankara* subscribers to his faith."

TRISALA'S VISIONS AND HIS BIRTH

The Saint's mother Trisala was a pious lady. Vardhaman's father, Siddhartha was the king of a small principality. They lived at Vaishali, modern village Basrah which was at that time a flourishing town being the capital of Videha. Today it is in the district of modern Muzaffarpur in Bihar. It is a great place of pilgrimage today, where people of all faiths, specially the Jains flock almost daily from far and near. The family hailed from a warrior clan—*Kshatriyas*. Before the birth of the Prophet of the new faith, the pious mother Trisala had a vision. She saw a series of pictures—fourteen in all, one by one. In the morning the queen told her husband all the details about the dream. The detailed discussion with their significance has been dealt with at length the Holy *Nidganda*

Dharma Mandal. The learned scholars explained to the king that they were highly auspicious. She first saw an elephant which was white in colour—*Svetahasti*, then *Jyotimoi* and then suddenly she saw that a pearl white lion jumped on her leg—*Subhravarna Sinha*. Then she found Devi Kamala in her hands. She was surrounded by vast wealth. King Siddhartha was simply stunned.

Continuing Trisala said, gradually she saw *Mandiramala*, then the Moon, then the Sun, then *Dhwaja*, then *Kumbha*, then a lotus pond and finally a pond of milk. This was finally wound up with the scene of bright mountain with soft light which looked very much like a hillock of diamonds and pearls. Lastly she saw a flame of fire.

The whole series signified the advent of the appearance of a great new Prophet interpreted the learned king Siddhartha. After all he too was the Saint's father. He was not an ordinary man.

Trishala was told that she was going to have a child who would be sent by the Almighty with a new divine message. He would be all powerful and the founder of a new religion.

An astrologer was consulted, as was the practice in the courts of India during those days. The astrologer heard everything. He analysed all the stages one by one. The astrologer observed, "you are going to have a great saintly man as your son soon. He will be a *Dikpal Purusha*, a person with outstanding unsurmountable personality and all conquering confidence. He will be the leader of millions and will build up a very large empire or he will be a *Jina* who will conquer the three worlds, one of the greatest men of the whole world—*Trikala Purusha*."

(For details scan the original text of Kalpasutra 4/81)

Both Trisala and King Siddhartha became very happy. But the king had some apprehension too. All these signs did not show that he would be a great conqueror in the battle field. All the explanations, the learned king realised, led to the advent of the arrival of a great spiritual path finder. His

heart was filled with sentiments. Did it not mean that the child would lead the life of a mendicant? A prince and a mendicant! How could that be? But he kept it secretly to himself and did not discuss it with the queen.

On the thirteenth day of the first lunar month just two days before the full moon during the festival month of May, 590 BC, Vardhaman was born to Trisala. The mother already knew who the new comer was. This was Trisala's second son. Nandivaran, the eldest son was an affectionate brother and a deeply pious prince. There was a ten-day festival in the whole kingdom of Vaisali. There was rich harvest. People had smiles on their faces. Foodgrains were available in abundance. The child has brought them good luck they all considered. Siddhartha consulted astrologers and learned Pandits. They all unanimously felt that the child had brought prosperity to the whole of Vaisala Kingdom. So he should be named *Vardhaman* which literally meant prosperity.

Siddhartha was known for his valour, all the neighbouring kings of Magadha, Avanti not only liked him, they were afraid of him too. He was popular and so well known for his sterling character and truthfulness and devotion to his subjects.

The great German Scholar, Herman Jakopi, who was an authority on the Jain religion has given details about the birthplace of Mahavira. He noted convincingly that it was Kondagram, near Vaisala, a small town. But the scholar felt that the father of the saint was perhaps not more than a mere feudal lord. It was perhaps not true that Siddhartha was a very strong ruler. Actually, the valour and kingdom of the father would not affect the historical background of the saint so much. He was a well to do person no doubt. In the Jain literature too Siddhartha has been described as a person belonging to the warrior class, described as a *kshatriya* and the mother Trisala has been described as a *kshatriyani*. It would be of interest to observe that nowhere they have been described as a royal family. Trisala has nowhere been described either as *Devi* or a *Rani*. It was true that Siddhar-

tha's wife Trisala was the sister of Chetaka, the king of Vaishali.

MAHAVIRA AND WORLD PEACE

One of the greatest apostles of peace, Lord Mahavira hailed from a royal palace. He preferred renunciation to a royal authority to explore Truth. He was among the first to renounce a royal throne. In that way he was a fore runner to Buddha, Bhartrihari and Yamunacharya. He was the pioneer to give India the message of *Ahimsa*, non-violence which penetrated down the veins of Indian body. That non-violence can be a tremendous inner force was realised by the Saint through deep meditation, self imposed penance and a strict drill of self-discipline.

Never before the need of *Ahimsa* was felt for civilisation than today. It has become the only need of the day to save humankind from total annihilation. The teachings of Mahavira are not restricted only to the Jains. No doubt Jainism is a living religion. What is more important is its all comprehensive acceptance by people belonging to other religions with equal respect and zeal. Bhagwan Mahavira's teachings provide peace and solace to millions throughout the world.

Leaving the royal robes and the worldly pleasure in a palace, he discovered the eternal truth of Indian philosophy that peace rested on renunciation.

Mahavira's main message was still higher. Besides preaching *Ahimsa*, the Saint insisted on equality. He introduced a system of wishing each other by a *mantra* which literally meant 'be equal'. He stood for non-violence and peace and justice.

It has been observed by a saint scholar "in his philosophy human equability serves as the propelling force of human achievement. His career is one of immense forbearance. The sufferings crumbled at his touch, not he at the touch of sufferings. Human might may be canalised to cause injury or to suffer it. Apotheosisor of the animal might may torture

others and such a one is not blessed with forbearance. One who has the true faith in one's own might, can bear suffering but cannot cause the same to others."

No saint was known to have undertaken the most difficult path of penance as Prince Vardhaman. Perhaps the Sufi Saint Baba Farid—who performed the most difficult *chilla-i-makus* style of spiritual exercise came close to him. Baba Farid tied a rope around his feet and remained suspended in a well, head down, for forty days and nights, while both fasting and praying. Bhagawan Mahavir practised unprecedented depth of concentration. It has been recorded that during a span of twelve years and thirteen fortnights of meditation, he subsisted upon mere forty eight minutes sleep. The rest of the period was devoted to meditation, in large measure. A period of sixteen days and as many nights was spent in an unbroken meditation.

Mahavir had long penances in the most difficult days. The most important thing he practised was tolerance. When he was sitting in deep meditation people who wanted to know his identity on hearing nothing from him for hours, considered him as dead and even did not hesitate to cut a lump of flesh to disprove that he was not dead. And yet they failed to distract him from his meditation.

Mahavir laid maximum emphasis on *Ahimsa* which led one towards a highly human outlook and good neighbourliness. This attitude to living beings has taken the shape of four-fold benevolence (*dana*) viz. *Ahara* (food), *Abhaya* (shelter), *ausadha* (medicine) and *Jnana* (education) by which a Jain is supposed to serve the society. The Jain monk, by his very nature and living has been, all along, winning respect from the society.

Quoted Lord Mahavira.

"One should know what binds the soul, and, knowing, break free from bondage. What bondage did the Hero declare and what knowledge did he teach to remove it? He who grasps at even a little whether living or lifeless or consents to another doing so, will never be freed from sorrow. If a man kills

living things, or slays by the hand of another, or consents to another slaying, his sin goes on increasing. The man who cares for his kin and companions is a fool who suffers much, for their numbers are ever increasing. All his wealth and relations cannot save him from sorrow. Only if he knows the nature of life will he get rid of *Karma*.

Ahimsa, anekanta and aparigraha have left an imprint on the society at various levels. Only in the light of these principles and practices one can understand the doctrines of non violence and fasting practised in modern times even by Mahatma Gandhi.

According to Lord Mahavira one should be unruffled in prosperity and adversity, life and death, applause and condemnations. honour and disgrace". Much later, this was also the message carried in the great Gita.

Mind is the headquarter of one's life. If one can culture one's mind he wins over everything. Mahavira's whole drill of penance was meant only to control the mind. This leads a human being to equability and freedom. In Lord Mahavira's philosophy "human eqability serves as the propelling force of human achievement. His career is one of immense forbearance".

One must get rid of ego. That is the main reason of all worldly evils. A man's desire has no ends as his ego has no limits to go higher. One has not to search here and there. Everything is already within one's own mind. An enlightened mind is always blissful. Mahavira said, "Seek not quietitude without. Seek in your own self the ever lasting fountain of quietitude. Make a venture and the stream of quietitude will burst forth unhindered. Material comforts may ponder to you with pleasure but the real happiness is far to seek. To seek quientessence of lasting peace, go into your self. Practise equilibrium. Each iota of you will then emanate peace."

One may differ from another in ideology or belief. That does not and should not mean any clash of ideas. One should not be dogmatic or fanatic. "Dogmatism is violence. Truth ought to be faithfully embraced and obsessively held. Opinio-

natedness is always disdained. No vehemence should occur during an honest exchange of idea. Attempt not to convert another to your views willy nilly." Mahavira noted, "Just as killing and torturing is violence, so is egocentrism and dogmatism."

Mahavira was among the earliest saints to oppose sacrificial violence, caste system and slavery. To get inner strength one must cultivate a spirit of self reliance. Said Mahavira, "he alone is virtuous who shuns sin during day and during night, in isolation and in company, in sleep and in waking and thus escapes moral lapse. Such beings never lose touch with the Supreme Soul, and are transmuted into the latter, ultimately."

"Uproot unhappiness, lock, stock and barrel. Those who seek to remedy unhappiness without remedying its root-cause, can never escape it."

"Casteism is irrational. He alone is exposed to such vitiated ideas who is not grounded in truth. It is one soul that reposes in the coloured and white, the oriental and the occidental, the virtuous and the vicious, the male and the female. Be not swayed by the pride of your caste. Boost not your ego with the complex of being superior to another. Be not mean or piteous by considering self as inferior to another. Be equal in all situations. Man reaps as he sows. Good actions beget good results and the bad, bad results."

Mahavira said, "Man ; you own immense might. You are the maker of your own destiny. Have faith in your own enterprise. Make an effort and the result is assured. He alone is venturesome who banks upon his own initiative. This faith will win for you the summum bonum." In the process one can win even a foe. Mahavira noted "Deem not another your foe. It is your own faith that is projected in the other as friendship and an absence of it as enmity. Be unprejudiced towards all. Each will appear as a friend to you, then to regard another as enemy is to suffer self mistrust. It is preferable to presume friendship in the opponent rather than start with presumption of his harbouring enmity with us and

then to attempt to befriend him. Here lies the germ of World Peace."

THE MAIN PHILOSOPHY OF JAINISM

A saint Jain philosopher summed up the high watermark of the lofty Jain philosophy. He observed, "From a pragmatic view, Mahavira is as fresh as ever. The obsolete is one which loses the capacity to offer solution. Mahavira's gospel amply retains that capacity today. That renders him as fresh as ever."

(Muni Nathmal : *Lord Mahavira*, p. 12)

This analysis of the great scholarly Jain Muni showed how prophetic was the vision of Bhagawan Mahavira. The utterances and stresses on different spheres of our social and religious activities are so significantly valid which could justify strongly how the Lord could visualise events to come even 2500 years earlier. His wisdom, realised knowledge, far sight and wider vision of the world events formed a most brilliant chapter in the history of culture and civilisation not only of India but of the whole world at large. That has been the reason why Jainism is a dynamic living religion in India today. The Jains have been playing a very important role in the socio cultural activity in the country. Their efforts and zeal, their unstinted love for their motherland and mankind as a whole have brought them to the very front line of philanthropic activities in the country and abroad.

In brief, it would be relevant to record the salient features of the philosophy as analysed by the enlightened Jain Muni himself.

The first point we should recall today while recapitulating the lofty ideas of Bhagawan Mahavira would be his emphasis on *liberty*. "Liberty is the prime fountain of all power. Coercive deterrence cannot form a valid basis for spiritualism. Identical is the case with Democracy." Mahavira observed Spiritualism draws upon the power that inherits in the spirit and democracy draws upon the power inheriting in the people. When an individual is fired with the urge to enjoy liberty,

spiritualism comes to the fore : When a people is fired with a similar urge, democracy comes into being”.

It will be interesting to note how the Jains follow this idea of liberty not only in the cases of human beings but also for the animals and even birds. In New Delhi itself, anybody can visit the old Lal Mandir which is there in front of the Red Fort. It is maintaining a *Birds' Hospital* right from the days of the Moghul rule. Perhaps it is the only one of its kind in the whole world. There, if you want to get your pet bird, say a parrot, to be treated you have to get it admitted but there is a condition. On recovery by a specialist, the bird will have to be left free ! That is liberty even for the caged bird.

Secondly, Lord Mahavira stressed on the importance of self determination. One should not leave his destiny in the hands of others. That is being followed by the Jains strictly. They form the most prosperous community in the whole of India. The happiness or unhappiness depend entirely on oneself. “We are the creators of our own happiness and unhappiness. We are our own friends and we are our own foes. It is left to us to decide what we make of ourselves.”

It is a valuable principle in democratic thought where an individual ceases to enjoy the right of self determination, his potential is thwarted. Dauntless capacity is needed to achieve development and it is the right of self determination that breeds this capacity”. Thirdly, the Lord came to the important point of self restraint. He insisted that “You must spare others from the compass of your restraint. You have to exercise your control over yourself—your body, your speech and your mind. You have to rule yourself by means of restraint and austerity. To submit to another’s control is to submit to coercive evil”, he said.

Further the Lord wanted that one must give equal opportunities to all “while we churn the curd, and draw one hand towards ourselves, the other is moved forward. Next we reverse the movement of the respective hands. This results in separating the cream”.

AS A PREACHER

As a great preceptor and preacher and guide to human civilisation, Mahavira gave certain basic keys to happiness and peace. Noted the saint, "It is the self who is the author of its happiness and affliction. It alone is its friend and its foe. Let it be restrained. One who restrains it wins the reward of lasting happiness. One is required to struggle with one's self only. When one is crowned with success in the venture one conquers the universe and is delivered of all affliction".

Finally he gives his greatest message. He says, "The main sign of *Dharma* is non-violence. A truly non-violent being would confer love on his enemies like his friends."

"The *Dharma* reposes in a virtuous life. *Dharma* is the last thing to be found in a non-virtuous life.

Practise not *Dharma* for prosperity and comforts nor for religious credit but for the purgation of your own self".

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND JAINISM

The contemporary religions Buddhism and Jainism both have many similarities.

To start with, both were founded by princes. The Buddha was the son of Suddhodana, king of the City State Kapilavastu. The Mahavira hailed also from a royal family. His father Siddhartha was the king of Vidiha, the portion of present day Bihar that lies to the North of the holy Ganges. Of course it was larger in size than Kapilavastu.

Both the princes left their royal palaces, their young married beautiful wives and a child each when their neighbouring states were thirsty to grab politically the principalities adjacent to their own kingdoms. For instance Buddha's next door neighbour Southern Neighbour Kosala, present day Uttar Pradesh, who did massacre all the 'Sakya' kinsmen and the fellow countrymen within the life time of the Buddha.

As Prof. Arnold Toynbee had observed, "both the Buddha and the Mahavira (the founder of the Jain religion) ignored

both the gods of the traditional Indian Aryan pantheon and the institution of caste”.

(Toynbee, Arnold : *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 286)

In the same book, Toynbee also pointed out whereas Mahavira prescribed severe austerity for enlightenment, the Buddha preferred the *middle way*. He opposed any physical torture to the body with extensive austere religious experiments. (*Ibid*, p. 182)

“Both these religious innovators were *Kshatriyas* and both were aristocrats. The Buddha was the son and heir of the king of Kapilavastu, a city—state within the frontiers of the present day kingdom of Nepal ; the Mahavira (alias Jina, meaning the victor) was the son of the head of a kshatriya class in the city of Vaisali the capital of the kingdom of Vidisha in northern Bihar. Neither of them disputed the Brahmin’s monopoly of the performance of the efficacious rites, but both of them ignored the rites, the gods and the institution of caste itself. (*Ibid*, p. 222)

Comparing the approaches of the two great contemporary enlightened seers—Buddha and Mahavira, Toynbee further observed, “The Buddha attained his enlightenment when he recognised that the practice of extreme physical austerity was not the means by which enlightenment could be reached. Henceforth, he followed a middle way that seems austere to ordinary people but seemed lax to unbridled contemporary ascetics. The Buddha’s middle way has been indicated by the contrast between the respective subsequent fortunes of Buddhism and Jainism—a religion founded by the Buddha’s contemporary Vardhaman, known by his followers as the *Jina*, the victor or the Mahavira, the great hero.”

(Toynbee, Arnold, *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 182)

POPULARITY DUE TO LOCAL LANGUAGE

A notable feature common between Mahavira’s and Buddha’s way of spreading the divine message to the masses was in the local languages. Buddha preferred Pali to Sanskrit. Similarly, Mahavira’s message was spread in various Indian

languages. It must be observed here how both the religious faiths expressed themselves in so many languages enriching them. Indian literature in different regions are a lot to these two great saints who not only popularised their languages, their own messages put contributed a new great treasure of Indian regional literary heritage.

This brought religion to the doorsteps of the masses who so long were deprived of it because of the restriction of religious scriptures only to Sanskrit which was not necessarily known to all, least of all to the ignorant folks. This was not an ordinary achievement. It helped in raising the moral standard, divine outlook and spirit of righteousness as among the common man.

KARMA AND REBIRTH

The Jains believe in Karma. Jainism also believe in *Punarjanma* or reincarnation. It "conceives of *Karma* as something material, which uniting with the soul binds a man to the world and its attractions". Therefore "though it is regarded as a material substance, *Karma* is yet so subtle that it is imperceivable by the senses. It is in this *Karma* that the soul is bound, and it is for this reason that the soul is embodied in the substance of a being and that it is embodied from a beginningless past".

Soul is essentially free and it is divine. As soon as its true nature is revealed *Karma* disappears.

This is more in attune with the vedantic doctrine of *Avidya* or ignorance which explain that individual ignorance, though it may end, has no beginning.

The action and reaction of soul to *Karma* is not caused by anything externeous but the *Karma* itself. "As the soul comes into contact with the world outside, certain psychic conditions arise, such as the desire for enjoyment, which leads to ignorance of the soul's true nature."

Freedom from this attachment or allurement can be achieved through *Samvara* (self restraint). "By self discipline both ethical and spiritual there is induced a state known as

Nirjana or shedding of all past *Karmas*. At this point only rebirth ceases.

UNITY IN MULTIPLICITY

This is followed by *moksha* which according to the Jain philosopher consist in “freeing oneself from the shackles of *Karmas*, thereby escaping the cycle of birth and death and reaching beyond the world of relativity to the realm of infinite knowledge, happiness and power, where there is no more desire and no more action for no limitations hold soul back from its detained liberation.”

The Jain philosophy believe that “no absolute prediction about a thing is possible. Reality does not admit of absolute prediction but is characterised by appearance and non-appearance in the midst of permanance. One can speak neither of an absolutity unchanging permanance nor of absolute change without permanance. The reality, however, maintains its identity and permanance though it expresses itself in multiple forms. Jain philosophy is therefore called *anekanta vada*—Unity in multiplicity out of this concept grew the general theory of a plurastic universe”.

SALVATION THROUGH TRIRATNA

Salvation (*moksha*) is the ultimate aim of a divine life. This is achieved in a triangular way. The three elements known as *Triratnas* or three jewels are right faith, right knowledge and right conduct. It is very much like the Roman catholics who too look forward for salvation through faith, instruction and works. The Buddhists get it by the Noble Eight-fold Path.

Triratnas direct that all the three elements must work simultaneously. It is just for *moksha*. One has to be of right faith, of right conduct and must possess right knowledge. Only then, according to the Jain religion can one attain salvation.

Knowledge is vast. Here right knowledge means “true understanding” of the Jain principles. Right conduct means

“practical living” in conformity with the code of conduct of the Jain religion. Most important, however, is the right faith which means “unshaken faith in the teaching of the Jains”.

All sorts of superstitions and myths must be avoided. “Freedom from superstition, as well as from pride or arrogance or conceit is the primary necessity for developing right faith”. Only with this unshaken right faith one may proceed to right knowledge—“enlightened knowledge” understanding of the truths of the religion must be United to the third jewel—right conduct.

There are five *Vratas* to be followed for right conduct :—

1. First, *Ahimsa* (or non-injury) is the key to a right conduct. It means “not only that none does anything to living creatures but also that one shows them kindness.
2. Secondly, *Satya* (or Truthfulness). One must not tell a lie.
3. Thirdly, *Asteya* (or non-stealing) means a ban on grabbing other’s things without his knowledge.
4. Fourthly, comes *Brahmacharya* (or celibacy) in word, thought and deed.
5. *Aparigraha* or non-attachment to the world.

All these *vratas* taken together leads one to *Mahavrata* or Supreme vows, practised mostly by the Jain monks only.

FAITH CAN CONQUER EVERYTHING DIVINE

It is indeed interesting to know that Bhagwan Mahavira would claim any divinity. He did not have any plan to seek a following. He did not even support the idea of *Guruship*. To be exact, “He would not accept the cleavage of the worshipper and the worshipped. He would declare, “You are divine, all and one, in case you succeed to attain enlightenment. You are debarred from divinity if you are wanting in enlightenment. That is bound to slam the doors of your achievement. Then, the divinity in having in you goes dormant. Throw wide open your doors of achievement and your divinity is revived.”

A new window on God realisation was opened by the Lord when he uttered "One who is blessed with an implicit faith alone qualifies to head a seat. An indefinite fast terminating with morality is permitted to such a being; one with such devotion is endowed with supreme confidence and supreme concentration. So long as the faith is non-profound and the concentration vacillating, the spiritual attainments erode as fast as they are earned. Fourth is the front of power and concentration its storehouse. An enhancement of faith and resolute single mindedness open up the portals of human evolution. From this place does an aspirant succeed in discovering novel vistas for himself".

One should never lose balance of mind under any provocation. One must have coolness of mind all the time. Bhagwan Mahavira noted "Meet the evil submissively. A wise man reads his own good in it : a fool is merely enraged by it".

(*Acharang Dashvaikalika*)

NO GOD

In the *Cultural Heritage of India*, we find it recorded "According to Jainism there is no God or Creator and man's emancipation from suffering does not depend upon the mercy of any such being. By living an austere life of purity and virtue man can escape the ills of life. The best was the life of renunciation and it was the shortest way to salvation. Jainism is thus more a moral code than a religion. God, as understood by other religions is not needed by Jainism because it derives both inter-meditation and forgiveness. However, if the necessity arose it was not unwilling to admit a God of popular Hinduism to its galaxy. Being much less hostile and more accommodating to Hinduism than the other heterodox system, Jainism has survived in India till today".

According to Jainism, there is no supernatural power. Man can become a superman by ascetic practice. The ultimate goal of all spiritual practice is to become a Man-God *Paramatma*, supreme perfected spirit. The highest stage of spiritual attainment is the stage *Siddhaparamesthin* which is

described as a stage of “absolutely unconditional a state of passionless peace in which one is released from action and is without desire”.

Interestingly enough this has very great similarity with the spiritual experiments of the modern Saint with a highly scientific approach—Sri Aurobindo who talked of Supramental Stage of mind much akin to the state of *Siddhaparamesthin* of the Jain religion.

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11

Buddhism—Its Influence on World Culture

Swami Vivekananda had always the highest reverence for Buddha. Once someone asked the great Swami whether, because of his activities and dedication to mankind, Swamiji could have been the Buddha in his previous birth. Swami Vivekananda shot back, "What did you say? I am Buddha! I am the servant of the servants of the Buddha !

Vivekananda derived his motto of service to humankind *bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya* from the Buddha. This was the message of the *Light of Asia* immediately on his enlightenment given to the first batch of his five disciples. Throughout the world, the Ramakrishna Missions work on this motto as the key to their principle of service to humankind.

Delivering a lecture in San Francisco on March 18, 1900, Swami Vivekananda observed, "Buddhism is historically the most important religion—historically, not philosophically—because it was the most tremendous religious movement that the world ever saw, the most gigantic spiritual wave ever to burst upon human society. There is no civilisation on which its effects have not been felt in some way or other".

(Swami Vivekananda : *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 92)

It was a great movement touching humankind directly. It was perhaps the most challenging social direct action against the age old caste system. It was the first message of human love and compassion. The new religion was most dynamic in its approach. The followers, like their preceptor were, most enthusiastic. They were the first batch of world team of religious workers who took up the cause of service to mankind as the first mission of their religious activity. "They were the first among adherents of the various religions not to remain content with the limited sphere of their Mother Church".

Buddhism is perhaps the most travelled religion of the world. Buddhism travelled east and west, north and south. "The Buddhist religion reached into darkest Tibet". The followers of the Buddha, with a new spirit of spreading the great message of peace of the Enlightened one "went to Persia, Asia Minor; they went to Russia, Poland and many other countries of the Western world. They went into China, Korea, Japan; they went to Burma, Siam, the East Indies and beyond. When Alexander the Great, through his military conquests brought the Mediterranean World in contact with India, the wisdom of India at once found a channel through which to spread over vast portions of Asia and Europe. Buddhist priests went out teaching among the different nations, and as they taught, superstition and priest craft began to vanish like mist before the Sun". (*Ibid*, p. 92)

Six hundred years before appearance of Christ, Buddhism became a world religion. The "Indian civilisation had already completed its growth".

The new religious faith came like a vast wave touching all kinds of society and carrying away all the age old rigidities of rituals and caste consciousness. Mankind which was divided, rather compartmentalised, according to the church he belonged, the castes to which he was born or the region from which he hailed forgot about all such differences. The new bond of love united the whole of mankind in the service and deep tie of love and the message of peace. This team of workers with

the banner of Buddha were the forerunners, who heralded the dawn of a new era and inspired mankind and instilled in them a new hope of peace that was so vitally necessary in the politically exploited and religiously divided social orders in almost all the countries it touched.

Like Professor Toynbee, Dr. Radhakrishnan also specially noted the presence of so many great minds who felt for humankind six hundred years before birth of Christ. Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote, "sixth century B.C. was remarkable for the spiritual unrest and intellectual ferment in many countries. In China we had Lao Tzu and Confucius, in Greece, Parmenides and Empedocles, in Iran Zarathustra, in India Mahavira and the Buddha. In that period many remarkable teachers worked upon their inheritance and developed new points of view".

(Radhakrishnan, S. : *Foreword to the book 2500 Years of Buddhism*, p. v)

Lord Buddha was born at a time when the priesthood had been the most powerful force in the realm of spirituality. Religion and higher thoughts of enlightenment were restricted only to a limited few. Just like Lord Christ's appearance and his challenge to the existing domination of religion by the priestly class as described all through the *Old Testament*, Buddha had challenged the superstition of the priests. "The outcome of this fight (with the priests) was the triumph of the prophets and the defeat of the priests".

The role of the priests more or less like the middle men was so strong that people all over the world thought that to reach divine authority and God, one must approach Him through the priests. The priests everywhere almost banned religious functions without their presiding over the rituals. They too had to be worshipped and paid everywhere in the world. "Throughout the history of the world, this priestly tendency has cropped up again and again—this tremendous thirst for power, this tiger like thirst, seems a part of human nature". Swamiji explained how for generations they have been dominating the realm of religion for centuries. This monopoly was challenged for the first time in world history.

Professor Arnold Toynbee in his *Mankind and Mother Earth* observed, "The Buddha set out to eradicate the self-centredness and the greed that are innate in every living being. He had an intuition that the human spirit is capable of overcoming Nature ; he had the courage to translate this intuition into action ; and when his own action had won for him his enlightenment, compassion led him to show the way to his fellow sentient beings".

(Toynbee, Arnold : *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 182)

When one visits the lofty peaks of the mighty Himalayas, the very solemnity fascinates. The atmosphere is captivating because of the deep spiritual experiments of hundreds of saints and seers who spent their whole lives there in the caves, got their divine knowledge, enlightened themselves and silently went into deep *Samadhi* which may be described as *Maha Samadhi*, which is synonym for passing away. They got salvation for themselves. Their number will not be insignificant. Even the old trees and the stones will tell you how blissfully those great souls passed into deep final slumber but they never returned to give a bit of their heavenly nectar thus gained to their fellow men. They never shared their ecstasies with the masses. Perhaps they did not feel it necessary. They might have left everything to the will of God but Buddha and Mahavira and for that purpose all the seers mentioned by Toynbee belonged to another category.

Lord Buddha and Pythagoras shared both a belief and an objective. "Their common belief was that death is not the end of life but is normally followed by re-birth, and that the series of deaths and re-births will continue *ad infinitum* if strenuous measures are not taken for breaking this sorrowful circle. To break it was the two seers' common objective". (*Ibid* p. 182)

Professor Toynbee made a remarkable observation when he noticed that the five sixth century BC seers were born and lived and worked in five different regional settings. It would be significant that none of the five were children of the two oldest civilisations of all, namely the Sumero-Akkadian and Pharaonic Egyptian. In the sixth century BC those two

ancient civilisations were still in existence but the new visions and the new directions came from regions whose civilisations were less venerable but were at this date, more dynamic”.

That dynamism happily continued with the Indian civilisation which is producing modern saints like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo.

BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA

Baisakhi Purnima or Full Moon Night in the month of May is a very sacred day for whole of India. It has been so for ages, ever since the beginning of *Sanatana Dharma* in India. This has been an auspicious occasion. People throughout the country, take a dip in the nearby river—be it Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, or Kaveri. It makes a great day of sanctity. On such a sacred day in 544 BC was born Siddhartha Gautama in Lumbini, Kapilavastu as the son of the ruler of principality.

This *Baisakhi Purnima* is an eventful day in the Buddhist world. It is connected with three major events in the life of the *Buddha*—his birth, enlightenment and *parinirvana*. It is one of the most sacred days in the calendar of world civilisation.

His father, King Suddhodana and mother Mahamaya had been both pious souls. It was believed—and it was a fact, great men look for pure souls, medium must be the purest—to be born on earth. They appeared only through a holy medium. Both the King and the queen had been great devotees of God. Suddhodana was a *kshatriya*, a warrior family of the Sakya dynasty.

It has been recorded in history that although both the mother and the father hailed from royal families and lived in luxury in royal palaces, the prince was born only in a grove. Mahamaya was going to her parent's palace at Devadaha to have the first child. That has been the normal tradition in India till today. While travelling from Kapilavastu to Devadaha—her father was the ruler of Koli principality with Devadaha as the capital—she gave birth to the divine son

Siddhartha in the Lumbini grove between the beautiful tall *sal* trees. The royal child who was destined to lead humankind spiritually refused to touch a royal palace even before his birth. In fact, for all practical purposes the divine personality left both the palaces before his birth. He preferred a forest, lonely, sacred and sublime.

This spot has become today a great pilgrimage attracting travellers—rich and poor—from far and near. Buddha the enlightened had conquered more than half the world and it was indeed a historical fact that even as a young lad how he told his royal cousin who once attempted to kill a bird by shooting it. The helpless wounded bird by chance fell at the feet of the young prince. When the killer came to claim it, Siddhartha refused to part with it. He wanted to nurse it and give it a new fresh life. Then he told his cousin, “you see, the greatest of all conquerors is not he who conquers a thousand men a thousand times in battle, but he who conquers his own mind !”.

Mahamaya, some how, had a vision about her son. She would see many wonderful sceneries—all heavenly ones. Such were the ways of appearance of all great souls. One of the scenes, record the earliest of the biographies of the Saint, “Mahamaya saw a great multitude of people bowing down to her” !

Siddhartha lost his mother when he was a child and had to be looked after by Prajapati, Mahamaya’s own sister and king Suddhodana’s second wife who looked after the child more than her own son and would not allow him to go anywhere beyond the palace. Mahamaya had done her part. Such persons never live long. They appear on the earth with a mission and they leave it after completing their assigned work. So did Mahamaya. She could not even fondle the child. She died after just a week.

According to royal tradition, an astrologer was summoned. Asita, the greatest among the contemporary north Indian astrologers was invited. The new born’s horoscope had to be prepared. The astrologer started shedding tears—tears of

both joy and sorrow. A very fine divine way of relieving one's mind indeed. Tears of joy because he could see the future of the child as a great saviour of mankind. "You, king are a blessed one. Your son is going to rule over the destiny of millions not only in India but much far beyond. I simply cannot imagine how far it will spread. It is going to be so vast !"

And tears ?

Tears of sorrow because Suddhodana would not live enough to see the name, fame and achievements of the son which was to spread throughout the world.

It was this great scholar in astrology, Asita who named the child as Siddhartha which literally meant one whose mission has been successful.

Both Mahaprajapati Gautami and King Suddhodana started shadowing the child, most affectionate and so sweet and attractive. They got immense inner joy even in the very presence of the child who was going to preside over the destiny of millions of the multitude.

Cousin Devadatta was the only playmate of the child. Siddhartha preferred to be left all alone however.

It was this Devadatta, who luckily, got unknowingly, the first sermon from the Lord. "You see my dear, a person who kills a bird does not own it. One who saves it only has the privilege of owning it."

Siddhartha did not even concentrate on playing with his cousin. He would only observe natural surroundings and events most minutely. Once he was watching in the royal garden a serpent catching hold of a lizard which had just swallowed an insect. Suddenly, he saw a kite which was flying high in the sky coming downward and just carrying away the serpent ! What a natural way of existence ! Survival only through violence ? He became restless. His mind would not get any peace. Is there no other way of survival ? Why this mutual attacks ? Why this reign of violence ? The young heart had the first ripple in his mind, a mind that settled the matter through conquering itself. Everything is dependent

on your own mind. All the replies are within yourself. You have not to roam around. The reply is within yourself. That is why the scriptures say *atmanang biddhi*—know thyself !

The ripple wanted the reply. The child's mind was restless. The inner quest made a storm in the heart. That is nature. Just before a peaceful shower even in the natural way it is welcomed only by a heavy storm. That is the way of nature. And here too there was no exception.

The only other companion, besides cousin Devadatta, to whom the child could ever open his mind was the coachman, who would take him daily for a ride. The avid mind had already a thousand questions to which his searching mind looked for answers. Whom else could he ask ? The king and the queen would only talk about how to rule well, how to look after the kingdom and the subjects. The boy thought who was he to rule over them ? Where is that invisible hand who is guiding this vast creation ? Why does He not appear before him to answer his quests ? The child was not allowed to mix with anybody, talk to anybody, open his heart to anybody. So he would always ponder over all the problems within himself. That violent scene of the serpent and the kite was followed up by other series of scenes.

The king was much worried over the son's future. Every-day he would only recall to himself about the forecast of the eminent astrologer Asita. How to get the child attached towards pleasurable luxuries in a royal palace ? How to bind him ? How to pin him down to the golden throne ?

These four scenes raised further queries to his already disturbed mind. Each one of them was followed by a fresh quest for an answer. The prince saw first a sick man. He asked the coachman, "why is he sick"? "All human bodies must be sick today or tommorow", answered the ignorant but royal companion.

Then he saw an old man and asked the coachman, "how is it that the man has gone so old ?"

The innocent coachman said, "All men must become old one day, you too would become old one day", told the coach-

man smilingly with affection. He desired a longer life for the prince in his heart of hearts.

Then the child asked, "you mean to say I shall have to become so old one day with my palsied limbs and sunken eyes and would be subject to such unspoken misery?"

The charioteer kept silent. Then the prince saw four persons carrying a bier.

"What are they carrying?"

"A dead man".

"Why is he dead?"

"All men must die one day, you, me, everybody. Nobody can escape death."

The child got perturbed. What a sad plight!

Finally, Siddhartha saw a monk in his saffron robes. The smile on the face, the brightness of the countenance and above all a heavenly bliss was so clearly visible on his whole appearance. In his heart of hearts Siddhartha got the reply. He became silent. When the pitcher is full it does not make any noise. The heart was filled with a fresh cheer in life.

Resultantly a royal proclamation followed. The coachman was directed not to take the child for a ride beyond the boundaries of the royal palace and the vast royal garden. But the sky has its reflection even in a cow's footprint.

Big discoveries have been done only in small laboratories. The heart of the young child became that laboratory. Now the prince was not allowed even to cross the gate of the palace. The royal proclamation was made known to all attendants. All had been warned sternly to keep their eyes on the child. The young prince who wanted to see the world himself outside the royal palace was made more or less an internee by the affectionate father. The child must not see anything unpleasant. He must not see the common sorrows and sufferings of the subjects. That might cause further tension in the child's mind about which the king himself was more worried than anything in his limited principality. The affectionate father

by now, knew the sensitive, delicate, thoughtful mind of his son. He was worried about only one thing. That was the royal throne. Who would sit on it after him ?

Things went on alright. But a river's course cannot be stopped. One by one the child saw from the royal chariot he noticed four scenes. His only companion now was the coachman. He could not take him beyond the royal palace and the royal garden, but he could not shut the prince's eyes ! Who said Buddha never fought a battle. He did fight. All the time there was a battle of wits between the father and the son. Gautama Siddhartha had decided to take to saffron the moment he saw the brightness and bliss on the face of the monk. Saffron is the symbol of renunciation. But Siddhartha did not know when ? How ? Where ?

At the same time king Suddhodana and Queen Mahaprajapati Gautami too were equally worried. They were both finding a strategy out to pin down their son to the royal throne. Both had an idea. They decided to get the Prince married. That might bring fresh turn in the lonely young man. Let him settle down. They were looking for a really beautiful princess. During those days the couple used to choose their own partners in life. All the royal nobles who had sisters and daughters were invited. They had to spend a week in the royal palace. Day after day there used to be royal games of skill, whirling of clubs, riding. In the evening there used to be programmes for entertainments. All were to participate. It was a novel way of knowing each other more intimately.

Everybody was attracted by the beauty and charm of Yasodhara. She was not only beautiful, she was talented and there was something specially attractive in her personality and grace. Both the king and the Queen had their eyes on her. But what about the hero. Why is he silent ?

Those days the custom was to give presents to the guests. So on the final day of bidding farewell, Gautama stood at the door offering to each one some splendid memento. He offered some princess a pearl necklace, to some one a bracelet of gold, to another a precious gem and so on. Finally came

Yasodhara. By that time Siddhartha had nothing left with him. He got a flower from his own cloak. All the eyes were set on him. They felt Yasodhara inspite of all her qualities failed to draw the mind and attention of the prince. They were proved wrong. But the rich beautiful young princess told the charming prince how she valued that flower. She said this beautiful bud seemed to her much more precious than all the jewels of the kingdom. So the next day the king of Kapilavastu Suddhodana himself in person waited in person on her father to ask her in marriage for his son, it was hardly a surprise to her. It was quite usual, natural and perhaps predestined. She had an intuition that Siddhartha could select nobbody else. She too had tremendous self confidence. So Prince Gautama Siddhartha finally was married to Yasodhara. King Suddhodana and Queen Prajapati Gautami thought they had won the battle and that their strategy had worked.

Here we have to note a very significant point. According to the scriptures there are ten *sanskaras* or ten events in life of one who is to preside over a new faith or order. Marriage is one of them. Mahavira the founder of the Jain order was married. Later on Mahaprabhu Chaitanya of the new Vaishnava order in whole of North India was married. In our modern days Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, *Prabhu* or Head of a new movement of religious synthesis of all faiths was married too.

Siddhartha was an ideal husband. He was devoted to Yasodhara too. They had a son, as sweet as a jasmine. He was named Rahul. Yasodhara on her part was most devoted to the prince. She was dutiful. In spite of the daily routine royal schedule the storm in the mind was stirring yet the royal prince. The dust under the feet was yet to get settled down. Such a mind cannot get a wink of sleep. Yasodhara could not know anything about the storm in the husband's mind. She was happy that the loving husband was so affectionate also to the child. She felt proud. Gautama thought before it was too late and he got more and more attached to the child, wife and the family he must take a final decision and do something about it. As described in the original biography, "An oil lamp cast

a dim religious light and smoke rose from the incense burner. Siddhartha tore himself away and unknown to anybody, rode away towards a forest. He discarded his royal robes, cut his long hair with his sword and became an ascetic.

Of course as a dutiful husband and affectionate father he did bid farewell to his loving wife who did not know what was happening to her and the child who too was fast asleep. He loved both but the call of the unknown was stronger.

Swami Vivekananda has given a beautiful description of the renunciation of Gautama Siddhartha. It was indeed a touching scene.

“The gods sang, ‘Awake. Thou art the awakened. Arise and help the world,’” and the struggling prince returned again to the bed side of his sleeping wife. What was the problem that vexed him? Why, it was she whom he was about to sacrifice for the world! That was the struggle. He cared nothing for himself. Then the victory and the inevitable farewell and the kisses imprinted so gently on the foot of the princess that she never awoke. Have you ever thought of the hearts of the heroes, how they were great, great and soft as butter”?

BUDDHA—THE LIGHT OF ASIA

Rabindranath Tagore rightly described the Buddha as “*the Light of Asia*” No single individual had ever marked his imprint in the history of civilisation than Lord Buddha. He had conquered about half of ‘known’ world. It was indeed a unique conquest. The surrender was voluntary. It was spontaneous. It was a conquest of hearts of millions. It was a victory through love. Buddha’s message, first preached before the five disciples *bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya for the welfare of many, for the bliss of many*, represented, in a capsule, the Indian philosophy. That has been the quintessence of our basic philosophy. That also reflected the inner voice of the rich cultural heritage of India.

A prince of a small principality left the royal robes. He became the symbol of world civilisation by his new conquest. He gave the world the message of love. Lord Buddha is so

relevant even today. In the words of Tagore, who was much inspired by the highest thoughts of the saint:

“The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred, the conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish, crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed. All creatures are crying for a new birth of thine. One thou of boundless life, have them, rouse thine eternal voice of hope, Let love’s lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey open its petals in thy light.

O Serene, O Free,

In thine immeasurable mercy are goodness

Wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.”

Not only Tagore, all great men of the east and many in the West were much influenced by the Saint. Even today millions long to touch the dust of the holy land of India only because it is the land of Buddha.

Lord Buddha had a fine sense of humour. Once an unwise person wanted to provoke the Buddha and unnecessarily started abusing Him. The Buddha did not lose His temper. He only asked him, “If a man declined to accept a present made to Him to whom does he return it ?” The unwise man said, “To the person who offered it”. Then Buddha said, “I do not accept your present of abuses. So you can imagine they go back to you.” Here He made His famous sermon : “A wicked man who abuses a virtuous one is like one who looks up and spits at heaven; the spittle does not soil heaven but comes back and defiles his own person.”

Another day Buddha went to a farmer for alms. The farmer got a little annoyed and very rudely told Him that it was by hard labour that he was getting his harvest. Buddha very quietly told him, “I too have earned my bread”. The farmer rejoined, “Then where is your plough and where are your oxen ?” The Buddha said, “The seed I sow is faith, the rain that waters the seed is repentance, wisdom is my plough and yoke, the oxen that draw the plough are diligence; with truth I cut away the weeds of sin and ignorance; my harvest is the fruit of immortality.”

What brought Buddha close even to the twenty first century was his abhorrence of rigid caste system. He hated superstitious rituals. He was one of the first saints of India to open the gate of God-realisation to the masses of people. The Sanskritised scriptures were recited and studied only by the orthodox brahmins. Many were not allowed even to listen to them due to their "low" birth. For the first time Buddha used the common man's language and introduced *Pali* for religious discourses and communications. He himself used to deliver his sermons in *Pali*.

Buddhism has been described perhaps in the largest number of languages in the world. They are distributed over so many languages. Some of the more important of these languages are *Pali*, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Apabhramsa and several Central Asian languages. It is not possible for any world scholar, however versatile, to go through all of them. From the point of 'compositeness and homogeneity' it is the *Pali* canon alone which has survived in its entirety and has been made accessible to the wider public through its translation into English and other European languages.

Pali is one of the very important early Prakrits, which was chosen by the Sthaviravadin Buddhists for recording the teachings of the Master. Buddha probably taught in Magadhi but as his doctrines spread over India they were adapted to the local dialects. *Pali* is still the religious language of the Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma and South East Asia.

Besides discarding orthodox demeanour, the age old rituals and difficult prayers, Buddha shunned idolatry. There is no place for images in Buddhism. Today Buddha himself is a victim of his over enthusiastic admirers. That is perhaps because of the strong moorings of the followers of idolatry inherent in all of us. Definitely there is no harm in having big statues of the great Saint. In fact, the world has seen some of the best pieces of workmanship centring round the life-long statues of the Saint. Had they habitually followed the teachings of the Master, the realm of architecture would have been much poorer.

Lord Buddha's contribution to enrichment of different literature is unparalleled. No other Saint has been discussed in so many languages of the world. The Buddhist literature in different languages form one of the richest treasures of the history of world culture and civilisation. Most interestingly they have been adopted and adapted in the light of local traditions, social environment and backdrops. That showed clearly how the Saint became so lovingly acceptable to all. They offered him the highest reverence in their own styles prevailing in their societies from time immemorial. He belonged to the whole world and the whole world belong to him.

The Buddhist organisation—*Sangha* is one of the most disciplined one. The ordained disciple was required to observe the Ten Precepts, namely, abstention from :

harming living beings,
taking what is not given,
evil behaviour in passion,
false speech,

Sura, meraya and *majja* (alcoholic drinks) which cause
carelessness,

eating at forbidden times (i.e. after mid-day),

dancing, singing, music and dramatic performances,

use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and jewellery,

use of high or broad bed,

receiving gold and silver.

These precepts were earnest resolves and not life-long vows. They were repeated regularly but any monk could leave the order if he felt he could not comply with them.

The personal possessions allowed to a monk were : three robes, a waist-cloth. an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle and water-strainer (cloth). Everything else offered to him had to be handed over to the *Sangha*.

The monk had to beg his food from door to door in the morning and take it back to the monastery for his mid-day

meal. As the monasteries became wealthy, however, the begging round was often reduced to a formality or altogether dropped.

The daily life of the monk was chiefly spent in study and religious exercises though he also took his share in the work of the upkeep of the monastery such as cleaning and sweeping.

An important spiritual exercise undertaken by the monks consisted of assuming Four Sublime Moods or *Brahmaythara* in which, sitting cross-legged, they endeavoured to fill their minds with the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism—*Maitri* (love), *Karuna* (compassion), *Mudita* (joy) and *Upeksha* (serenity)—and to contemplate all living beings in the light of these virtues.

Buddha's contribution in the spiritual awakening of man has been unique. His teachings have been simple. They are in local dialect Magadhi or Pali, free from the Sanskritised hurdles of expressions which are not accessible to the ordinary people. In *Dhammapada* clear cut guide lines are given. *Dhamma* is simple and ethical. One has "to abstain from evil, to accumulate what is good, and to purify one's mind". The emphasis is on *sila* or good conduct. One must lead a life of good conduct, attaining concentration to secure the balanced state of mind, that is, in His words *samadhi*. One must cultivate insight, that is *prajna* by understanding of the Four Noble Truths i.e. suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessations of suffering. This can be done by following the Noble Eight Fold Path, which the Lord described always as the Middle Path as it avoided both the extremes of self indulgence and self-mortification. The Saint believed in the doctrine of *Karma* and Rebirth. But he was averse to "metaphysical speculation, for instance, about the origin or end of the Universe. He left some questions on the subject unexplained "because they are not of any use or benefit for holy life, nor are they calculated to lead to detachment from the world, to a dispassionate state of mind, cessation, or to *nirvana*."

Like Buddha's teachings, Buddha's philosophy too was quite simple. A great scholar summed up the entire philosophy of this world saint in three words ; *anatman*, *anitya*, and *duhkha*. Buddha said, "There is no such thing as a person or a living being, an ego, or a living entity which may be called a permanent soul. The notion of *atman* is a mere convention. Except *nirvana*, all things are evanescent or *anitya*, and so are painful *duhkha* and devoid of any everlasting substance."

Buddha thought that this life covered the three planes of existence : *Kama bhava* or desire, *Rupa bhava* or form and *Arupa bhava* or the formless. "Any individual moving in this round of life may be found to be moving in any of these three planes."

What about transmigration of soul ? "If there is no soul that transmigrates from one life to another, how is it that the continuity of one and the same individual is maintained ? Is there anything that passes from one life to another ?

It is here that the role of *Karma* start.

Karma continues till its force is exhausted. If a man starts a work and leaves the spot before the result is achieved, the result will not stop. It is a chain of actions and reactions. "The flame has not migrated from the candle to another and yet the flame of the new candle, could not have come into existence without the assistance given by the old candle."

Arnold Toynbee was not sure about the date of Lord Buddha. In his masterly *Mankind and Mother Earth*, he wrote, "The Buddha's date is almost as uncertain as Zaratustra's. It may have been 567-487 BC. It is however, certain that Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha was born in Kapilavastu, a small city state within the frontiers of the present day kingdom of Nepal, and that his field of activity was present day Bihar. Confucius was a slightly younger contemporary of the Buddha, if his traditional date, 551-479 BC, is approximately correct. His home country in China was the state of Lu, one of the smaller and weaker of the states into which the Chou dynasty's domain had fallen apart by Confucius' day. Pythagoras was an approximate contem-

porary of the Buddha. He was born on the Iranian off-shore island Samos, but his field of activity was the colonial Greek domain in the southern Italy, and the city-state in which he settled down was Croton."

Toynbee continued "with the possible exception of Pythagoras, these sixth century BC seers are today still influencing mankind, either directly or indirectly more than any human being who is now alive. The Buddha is influencing directly more than half, and Confucius more than a third of the living generation."

(Toynbee, Arnold : *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 176-77)

The great historian described how the spreading of the enlightened message of the Buddha led to a new spiritual family. It led to the foundation of a new religion. He recorded as a historical fact that "the Buddha believed that everyone has to attain enlightenment by his own efforts, and that, if and when he attains it, he is free to make his exit into *Nirvana*. Yet the Buddha postponed his own exit, and then voluntarily remained in the condition in which life involves pain, the order to show to the other sentient beings the way out that he had found."

(*Ibid*, p. 180)

Professor Toynbee should have included in this list of sixth century B.C. seer Mahavira. He only mentioned him incidentally.

IMPACT OF BUDDHISM ON WORLD CIVILISATION

The holy touch of the Buddha has left its deep impact in all parts of the world. It had tremendously influenced world philosophers, thinkers and history of civilisation. It was only the Mahamati among the seers of India who had so greatly shook world thinkers and made them rethink once more how to preserve peace in the whole world. Even those scholars who do not belong to the order have the highest reverence for the Buddha, his life which they take as the most ideal among men and his message which they too prescribe as an important guideline to mankind.

For instance in his *Story of Philosophy*, Will Durant tells us how Spinoza would respect the Buddha. Under the title *Intelligence and Morals*, describing Spinoza's thoughts on the subject Durant wrote, Spinoza thought "ultimately there are but three systems of ethics, three conceptions of the ideal character and the moral life. One is that of Buddha and Jesus, which stresses the feminine virtues considers all men to be equally precious, resists evil only by returning good, identifies virtues with love and inclines in politics to unlimited democracy. Another is the ethic of Machiavelli and Nietzsche, which stresses the masculine virtues accepts inequality of man, relishes the risks of combat and conquest and rule, identifies untruth with power and exalts hereditary aristocracy. A third, the ethic of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, denies the universal applicability of either the feminine or the masculine virtues and considers that only the informed and mature man can judge, according to diverse circumstance, when love should rule and when power identifies virtue, therefore with intelligence; and advocates a varying mixture of aristocracy and democracy in government".

(Durant, Will : *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 179)

The main point to specially make note of would be that the greatest among the great world thinkers while analysing a path for proper guideline to mankind thought of other pathfinders of the world of all faiths and nations. Buddha's thought appeared before them before anybody else's ! It was not an ordinary tribute to the cultural and philosophical achievement of India !

BUDDHISM IN BURMA

India and Burma are emotionally attached for ever because of the cultural affinity. It has been recorded that two Buddhist monks Sona and Uttara were sent by Emperor Asoka to preach Buddhism in Suvarnabhumi, present Burma. There are definite records to prove not only the existence but also the flourishing state of Theravada Buddhism in the old Kingdom of the Pyus known as Sriksetra with its capital near Prome, the ruins of which lie in the modern Hmawza.

It has also been recorded that "The archaeological remains of Hmawza, about five miles from modern Prome, and the Chinese accounts leave no doubt that the *Theravada* form of Buddhism with Pali canonical texts was introduced in the region round Prome not later than the fifth century A.D. by Indian missionaries who came from the eastern coast of the Deccan and South India. But side by side we also find traces of *Mulasarvastivada* and *Mahayanism* which probably came from eastern India."

(See *Two Thousand Five Hundred Years of Buddhism*, p. 87)

Till today while recalling the relation between India and Burma at the top most level even in the Diplomatic platforms, the first name uttered who brought these two countries so nearer is the Buddha. At the Rashtrapati Bhavan, President, S. Radhakrishnan, welcoming the Chairman of the Revolutionary Council of Burma observed in New Delhi, "culturally there is a strong link which binds us, that is the Buddhist doctrine which has permeated Burmese life and thought. Buddhism had its roots in this country. The Buddha told us to practise what he called *dharma*. It is both individual freedom and social justice".

(Radhakrishnan S. : *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 266-67)

During the reign of king Aniruddha, Buddhism flourished in Burma. Aniruddha built numerous pagodas, temples and Buddhist monasteries. His successors drew inspiration from him and followed it up. Complete copies of the *Tripitakas* was brought from Ceylon. Aniruddha's son, Kyanzittha followed in the footsteps of his father, and built the famous Ananda Temple at Pagan.

BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Buddhism touched China in 217 BC. It started from the capital of China in Shen-Si. By 122 BC, a golden statue of the Buddha was brought to Emperor and as recorded in Chinese Chronicles this was the first statute of the Buddha to be brought to China for worship.

The Emperor Ming-ti sent an emissary to India in 61 AD to collect the Buddhist canons to China. He invited monks to come to China to preach Buddhism. Kasyapa Matanga who lived in Central India went to China with the Chinese visitors. He translated a small but important *Sutra* with forty-two sections. He died finally after preaching the substance of Buddhism at Long Yang.

A caravan of Chinese pilgrims visited India early in the fourth century A.D. to adopt the Buddhist monastic rituals. During 335 A.D. a Prince of the Ch'an Kingdom during the reign of the Eastern Ts'in dynasty sent his attendants to keep Buddhist observances. A number of monasteries were constructed in north China and it is recorded "nine tenths of the people embraced Buddhism."

During the fourth and seventh centuries great Buddhist Scholar pilgrims and eminent travellers from China visited India who collected many important original Buddhist texts. They were Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang. These holy scriptures were received by China with great reverence. A number of Buddhist Scholars also visited China at the special invitation of the Chinese Emperor. The most outstanding among them were Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma and Paramartha. "With Fa-hien and Yuan Chwang they became the founders of various schools of Chinese Buddhism."

At that time there was no specialised school or institution to teach Buddhism as such but gradually the Chinese Buddhists popularised themselves with different kinds of Buddhism. "As the Buddhist faith spread in China, its sub-divisions also spread throughout the country from the North to the South. Orthodox Buddhism thus steadily became heterodox and came to acquire characteristics of its own."

Bodhidharma preached that human being could attain Buddhahood only through consciousness of the identity of both the relative and the absolute. He came to China about 740 AD and became the founder of esoteric schools which came to be divided into five principal branches, *tan*, *Ch'an*, *dhyaana*, *Jap*, *Zen*.

It has been recorded that "the followers of Bodhidharma were active everywhere and were completely victorious over the native religions with the result that the teachings of the esoteric schools have come to be highly prized even in modern Japan". Obviously the ideas had been spread from China originally.

There has also been belief that "Bodhidharma although a founder of the esoteric schools, should have based his philosophy upon that of Nagarjuna, the most important teacher of *Mahayana* Buddhism. Nagarjuna founded the *Madhyamika* school of philosophy, which reduced everything to *sunyata*—non substantiality—and thus established the *Madhyamika Pratipad* (the middle way). His philosophy influenced Kau Hwei—even who had studied the *Sastra*—*Ta-chi-ue-lun*, and adopted the conception of concentration upon the Middle Way—*Ching Kwan*. On the basis of the ideas of Kan Hwei-wen, Tu Hwei Yang and Lieu Hing-si established the *Nan-ngo* and *Ts'ing Yuen* Schools in China.

These schools insisted on inward enlightenment and rejected the outward side by which they felt the human mind ultimately could reach Buddhahood.

The Vinaya School is based on the *Vinaya* of the sacred books, which were compiled at the council held after Buddha's death. Upali founded this schools in India. The Chinese had very high respect for him and have almost given them a Chinese name Yen-po-li. The Japanese too have high regard for him where they have described the scholar's name also as Upali. Upali was a direct disciple of the Buddha. He was also equally respected for his authentic treatise on the Buddha's philosophy which has been extremely popular. The Chinese name of the book is *Si pu-luh*. He was responsible for preaching the doctrine of the Discipline of Four Divisions. In the seventh century Tao Hsuan established this school based on Upali's ideas.

The Chinese interpretations of Buddhism were not necessarily wholly Indian. "The ceaseless study of the Buddhist texts by the Chinese Schools resulted in completely new

religious experiences which seem to have grown out of the historical background of China rather than of India."

China first carried the messages of the Buddha by the nomadic tribes. It was only in the first century BC that Buddhism penetrated the hearts of the Chinese and "within a century it was officially recognised as a religion worthy of toleration."

One must not forget this was the period when the learned enlightened Confucianism too was equally importantly practised. "Buddhism had a hard struggle with the indigenous religious system. Confucianism, with its traditional prestige at the court and its hold on the nobility looked down upon Buddhism as a barbaric religion. In the Han period attempts were made to transform Confucianism into a religion but its regular character was not much developed than Buddhism. Taoism was more firmly established as a religion, but its philosophical background was much weaker than that of Buddhism. This gave Buddhism certain advantages over the indigenous religion."

The Chinese people appreciated that "Buddhism was much richer religion than Confucianism and as it possessed a much profounder philosophy than Taoism, it soon attracted the Chinese. The Chinese literati themselves started pleading for Buddhism. Thus Mou-tseu who lived towards the closing years of the Han period (170-225 AD) wrote a treatise in which he compared the doctrines of Buddhism with the teachings of Confucius and Lao-tseu and tried to establish the superiority of the former." These learned scholars took up the matter on their own. Certainly their intellectual analyses played an important role in the minds of the Chinese people who too were equally eager for real knowledge. Gradually more and more Chinese got attracted to the philosophy of the Buddha.

The influence of the Buddhist scholars who visited China during the beginning of the first century and continued it for full one century also attracted the attention of the Chinese people. They were specially touched by the life of purity followed by the Indian Buddhists. "The Wei dynasty which

came to power in the 4th century AD was of foreign origin. They were great patrons of Buddhism and were responsible for the beginning of all the great works of Buddhist art in that country. The first Emperor of the dynasty made Buddhism a State religion." It continued till the 11th century.

The history of Chinese civilisation, one of the oldest, the richest in the world will reveal how deeply it had been influenced by Buddhism. "The influence of Buddhism" wrote a scholar, "on Chinese life and thought was tremendous. Besides certain forms of theistic religious beliefs, Buddhism introduced in China the doctrine of rebirth, the idea of casualty, and the belief in reward and retribution. Buddhist philosophy, especially its conception of reality which permeated everything in nature and the notion of universal impermanence, had an abiding influence on the poets and artists and influenced China's aesthetic outlook. Buddhism also brought to the Chinese a deep religious feeling and a profound faith, which inspired the great works of art in China such as we find in Yung-Kang, Hung-men, Tunhuang and others.

The Chinese Buddhist monks, dedicated, devoted and learned as they were played a most significant role in propagating Buddhism in the Far Eastern countries. In fact, it became a centre of learning in Buddhist scriptures for the people of Japan, Korea and the neighbouring states who found it easier to cross over to China which was the nearest place of Buddhist centre of learning. Besides that quite a large number of Buddhist holy scriptures were already collected by Fa Hien, Hien Tsang and I'tsing and great many scholars had got them translated with easier popular interpretations. The Buddha became the centre of cultural and religious attractions of the kings and Emperors. He started attracting the masses of people too who, gradually came to know about his democratic way of living, message of peace and kindness to all. Buddha's message of service to mankind had universal appeal.

BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

Japan was and till today is very loyally devoted to Mahamati Buddha. They found emotionally the message of the

Buddha as the ideal religion. The Buddhist sects in Japan are thirteen in number : *Kegan*, the *Ritsu*, the *Hoss*, the *Tenda*, the *Shingon* (Tantric Buddhism), the *Jodo*, the *Jodo shin*, the *Yuzunenbitsu*, the *Ji*, the *Rinzai*, the *Soto*, the *Obaku* and the *Nichiren* sects.

Most of the Buddhist sects in Japan originally came from China. The *Kegan*, the *Ritsu*, and the *Hosso* retained their Chinese character while others were local creations and have been completely remodelled.

It was Saicho who introduced Buddhism to Japan in a popular way in 804 A.D. Kukai, younger to Saicho an ardent ascetic traveller and a famous calligrapher and sculptor, a versatile figure, known for his deep learning was the next to spread Buddhism in Japan after returning from China which he visited in 804 A.D. There he studied in depth the Buddhist philosophy under the discipleship of the scholar priest in China Houei Kouo. On return to his motherland he established the most widely known monastery of Shingon sect on the mountain of Koya-San.

The doctrine of Shingon sect is based on *Tantric sutras*. It is mainly known for its magical and mystical practices. "The name Shingon came from the Sanskrit *mantra*, meaning sacred formula." According to this doctrine of this sect, enlightenment can be attained through the recitation of a *mantra* or *dharani*.

The *Pure Land Buddhism* comprises the *Jodo*, the *Jodo-Shin* and *Ji* sects. "The essential doctrine of these sects is that salvation can be attained only through absolute trust in the saving power of Amitabha", the Buddha.

Zen Buddhism made a significant contribution to the entire cultural life in Japan. It brought to Japan the higher Chinese culture of those days.

How much the introduction of Buddhism meant to the people of Japan, has been clearly stated by Dr. D.T. Suzuki. Speaking of the eagerness with which they took up the study of the *Dharma* in the Nara period, he remarked, "Buddhism

was to them a new philosophy, a new culture, and an inexhaustible mine of artistic impulses."

(Suzuki, D.T. : *Japanese Buddhism, Essays in Zen Buddhism*, p. 340)

In China *Chan* was a popular form of Buddhism. From *Chan* it derived the word *Zen* which is a translation of the Sanskrit word *dhyana*. From China this doctrine reached Japan where it is practised even today. Zen Buddhism has three branches in Japan namely the Rizai, the Soto and the Obuku. The eminent Japanese monk Eisai (1148-1215 AD) founded the first group followed by Dogen (1200-1253 AD) who had set up the second school. The third group however was started by a Chinese Buddhist monk Igen about 1653 AD. Both Eisai and Dogen had specialised the Buddhist philosophy by studying it for several years in China.

What is Zen Buddhism ?

"Look into the mind and you will find Buddhahood". Zen Buddhism lay great stress on meditation and contemplation which alone can lead one to enlightenment.

Doctrine of Dogen has been one of the most important and representative features of Zen Buddhism.

There we find the zen putting the question themselves "why did so many Buddhas practise the way of self-enlightenment, although all living beings, by their very nature, already had Buddhahood in them ?" No Buddhist scholar had an answer to this query. Dogen was sent to China particularly to get an answer to this all important question. He had led a long spiritual Buddhist's life, and finally attained enlightenment directly under a great Zen Buddhist monk. Then he came to Japan to preach the theme of Zen Buddhism. He said, "All human beings have already been enlightened. They are Buddhas by nature. The practice of meditation is nothing but the Buddha's act itself".

The Japanese culture was much influenced by Zen Buddhism. It brought to Japan the higher Chinese culture of those days. The painting in black and white, the Noh dance,

the Tea ceremony and the Flower arrangements—all came into vogue as a result of the influence of Zen Buddhism."

BUDDHISM IN CEYLON

Ceylonese Chronicles mention that the great Emperor Asoka (C 273-236 BC) "organised a network of missions (*Dharma Mahamatyas*) to preach the gospel of the Buddha in and outside India. He sent his son (or brother) Thera Mahendra, together with four others, to Lanka or Ceylon and they preached the teachings of Gautama Buddha to king Devanampiyatissa (247-207 BC) and his attendants".

They were touched by the lofty ideas of the Lord. They all embraced Buddhism. It became a state religion. It had indeed phenomenal progress. "Hundreds and thousands of men and women embraced the new faith and thousands entered the *Sangha* and adopted the life of *bhiksus* (Buddhist monks). New Buddhist monasteries were built everywhere. People gave lumpsum for their maintenance."

The queen (Anula) wanted to become a Buddhist along with thousands of other women. They were eager to get *prabhajja* initiation but the king wanted proper priests from India to do it. So he sent in turn Emperor Asoka to send some distinguished nuns, to do the needful. Asoka the great was thrilled. He sent Sanghamitra, his daughter, who had already become a nun to initiate the faithful ones.

Ceylon played an important role in spreading the message of the Buddha before it was taken up by China. It has appropriately been recorded, "the Buddhist world own a great debt to Ceylon". The Pali canon has been preserved in its entirety in this island and Ceylonese Buddhism had great influence upon other countries where Theravada Buddhism flourishes today."

Ceylon was a great centre of Buddhist learning. The Buddhist texts were available quite in large number over there and people from far and near came here to study them. Even now Buddhism is prevalent in Ceylon. The important schools of Buddhism — *Abhayagiri*, *Dakshina Vihara* and *Jetavana* were predominant among the Buddhists. The Abhayagiri School was earlier known as

Dharmaruchi Nikaya and flourished as a "respectable rival to the Mahavira School from which it differed in some fundamentals." The disciples of this group were known as Vetulyavadins. There was almost always a conflict of thoughts rather a "struggle" between the Mahavira School and the Abhayagiri School, the former ultimately won in Ceylon.

In Ceylon at present there are three different fraternities among the Buddhist schools of thought. These groups have been named after the places of their origin. From these places only Upasampada was brought i.e. Siam, or upper or lower Burma.

During those days, of course, both Burma and Ceylon were parts of India. These two places were following Buddhism, as was the general pattern of whole mainstream of Indian philosophical thinking. There was nothing special about it.

BUDDHISM IN THAILAND AND CAMBODIA

Buddhism had influenced life and culture of the people of Thailand and Cambodia where even non-Buddhists have very high regard for the Enlightened One.

General public look to it as in the whole world, people, even non-Christians, respect Christianity. Buddha became a household name in the whole of Asia.

There are mainly two groups of Buddhist faith that people in Cambodia and Thailand propagate: *Mahānikaya* and *Dhammayuttika*—*Nikaya* which had been derived mainly from *Ramann* sect of lower Burma. The *Dhammayuttika Nikaya* is stricter in its discipline.

In Cambodia, "the difference is restricted mainly to the pronouncing of Pali words and to very minor rules of conduct."

As is known to all, Cambodia, during those days was known as *Kambuja*. There are archæological evidences, supported by Chinese Chronicles, that Buddhism flourished in Cambodia from the 5th century AD. It would be interesting to note how during those days it was emotionally and actually

attached to India. It has been recorded "Buddhism flourished in Cambodia from the end of the fifth century, though it did not occupy a dominant position, as it was less popular than some forms of Brahmanical religion like *Saivism*. The great emperor, Yasovarman, who ruled at the end of ninth century AD established a *Sangatashrama* which was specially meant for the Buddhist monks and elaborate regulations were laid down for the guidance of this *ashrama* or hermitage."

In the thirteenth century Buddhism reached its peak in the life of the people of Cambodia. The Thais of Siam had influenced them much. The people of Thailand were "ardent Buddhists and had conquered a large part of Cambodia. Whereas in the earlier period Siam was influenced by Cambodia, the role was now reversed." Now Cambodia came under the influence of Thailand politically and to a great extent culturally. It "was converted almost wholesale to Buddhism." In Cambodia, people who had so long faith in the Brahmanically worshipped gods in the great sanctuaries like Angkorvat were gradually replaced by Buddhist images. This was a historical event but the details and dates were not to be found anywhere authentically. The figures in the Temples remain in tact even today. As a historian scholar observed, "we cannot trace the exact stages of this conversion but gradually; Buddhism became the dominant creed in Kambuja and today there is hardly any trace of the Brahmanical religion in the country, except in some of the ceremonies and festivities of the people of Kambuja."

Kambuja inscriptions, however give some information in Sanskrit about the spread of Buddhism in Cambodia. It was during the reign of Jayavarmana VII. His queen had deep religious moorings Jayavarmana had gone to *Campa* that is modern Viet Nam, his wife Jayarajadevi died, showed her conjugal fidelity by undergoing austerities of diverse types and long duration. Her elder sister who was a Buddhist, initiated her to Buddhism. Traditionally it was observed that "she performed a ceremony by which she could see before her the image of her husband who was absent. When her husband returned, she increased her pious and charitable works." This

was the beginning of popularising the Buddhist faith in Kambuja. *Jatakas* were dramatised and shown before the people by queen who herself organised it with assistance of the Buddhist nuns.

BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM

Vietnam was known in earlier days as Champa. It was lying on the eastern coast of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. Its name was Annam when it became a Hindu colony, the name was changed to Champa. Before the third century AD, Buddhism entered the land. This has been proved by the discovery of a fine bronze image of the Buddha of the Amara-vati School which was ruling at that period. In 605 AD it was captured by the Chinese "they carried away 1,350 Buddhist works". This indicated that Champa became a centre of Buddhist research even before this date that was the seventh century A.D. This could also be inferred from the Chinese traveller I-tsing whom Max Mueller frequently referred in his *INDIA WHAT IT CAN TEACH US*, "in Champa the Buddhists generally belong to the *Arya Sammatiya* School and that there are a few followers of the *Sarvastivada* School also. This would mean the prevalence of the *Sarvakayana* sect."

The Mahayana Buddhism flourished in Viet Nam. Buddhism was patronised by kings and senior officials. At Dong Duong there are many clear indications of these influences. There are ruins of contemporary temples also which prove the existence of earlier Hindu influences.

Buddhism flourished in Viet Nam right upto the fifteenth century A.D. when it was attacked and ransacked by the Annamites from the North. They were profoundly influenced by Chinese culture. So these Annamites, after their conquest of the land spread their own faith which they derived from Chinese philosophy and fresh form of Buddhism. The old religion of Champa that Viet Nam underwent a sudden but perhaps a welcome change.

The people of the land got introduced to the lofty ideas of the Buddha.

BUDDHISM IN AFGHANISTAN

The records of the various Buddhist pilgrims clearly indicate that "the extension of Indian culture beyond its geographical frontiers" was clear cut. It was intimately connected with the spread of Buddhism. It was specially due to the efforts of Emperor Asoka. All the important Buddhist pilgrims from China Fa Hien (400 AD), Sung Yun (518 AD) and Huen Tsang (629 AD) mentioned the existence of Buddhism in Afghanistan. *Gandhar* or Kandahar felt the touch of Buddhism both during the reigns of Asoka and the Kusan King Kaniska.

Two great Indian Buddhist monks Arhat Matanga Kasyapa and Arhat Bharena Pandit were invited to China by Emperor Ming-Ti in 67 A.D. to spread widely the holy message of the enlightened Buddha. They preached Buddha's message at Kandhara on their way. "The Buddhist sites in Afghanistan are generally located along or adjacent to caravan routes passing through Khyber Pass and to Balkh. In Kabul Valley alone more than 50 Buddhist establishments exist. They are generally of stone masonry composed of schist. In the earlier structures ordinary rubble was used but about the first century AD a masonry known as diaper patterned, rubble appeared." These are ancient Buddhist *Stupas viharas* and rock cut monasteries which clearly show the deep imprint in the cultural life of Afghanistan of the Buddha. Some of them may be mentioned to elucidate the theory. The ruined *stupas* at Binaran near Jalalabad give the earliest image of Buddha flanked by Indra and Brahma, the famous reliquary of gold set with rubies found inside a stone vessel from another *Stupa*.

Begram or ancient Kapisa, says Jenine Auboyer in his *Ancient Indian Ivories from Begram, Afghanistan* in the Journal of the Indian Society (1958) was situated on the direct caravan route connecting Peshawar and Balks. The ivories discovered from this place have unmistakable Indian impact. Hien Tsang mentioned that a devoted Buddhist of the Mahayana pantheon was the king of Kapisa.

Hadda is another such spot visited by all the three Chinese pilgrims Huen Tsang, Fa-hien and To-Young because it was

famous "for preserving a tooth relic, *sanghati* and the stick of the Buddha". The old *stupa* is called the *Tappa Kalan*. Previously it was known as *Nagaravihara*. Hadda has some of the finest stucco sculptures of the Buddha. The most important Buddhist remains in Afghanistan could be found at Bamiyan.

BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

Buddha's influence in Nepal is but natural. Lumbini comes now in modern Nepal. Thousands of pilgrims visit Nepal to pay obeisance to the holy birth place of the lord at Lumbini.

Some of the oldest monasteries and stupas are obviously situated in Nepal. "The most typical form of the *stupa*, which is known to be the earliest Buddhist building, is furnished by the *stupas* at Sanchi but the oldest *stupa* in brick is the remnant at Piprawha on the Nepal frontier which probably dated back to 450 BC. The remains at Piprawaha show that brick was used for building long before the birth of rock architecture."

(*2500 years of Buddhism*, p. 280)

Another holy Buddhist monastery in Nepal is the Svayambhunatha Temple in Nepal. It is actually a *Chaitya*. The Nepalese copper gilt images are famous all the world over. Most of them are Buddhist and Hindu images. However, the other most important Buddhist monastery is the Bodhnath. As recorded in history, "of the two oldest *stupas* from Nepal, the Svayambhunath and the Bodhnath, the latter presents a typically Nepalese form. It is a tumulus over a square base with the box like harmika on top, surmounted by the conical finial which is so characteristic of *stupas* from other parts of South-East Asia including Ceylon and Burma."

"The art of Nepal and Tibet is largely derived from the Pala art, just as Buddhism itself was introduced in this area from Nalanda." The Buddhist pantheon comprised many gods and goddesses—the *Dhyani* Buddha, the *Manushi* Buddhas, *Mainthilya Bhatsajya* Buddhas or meditative Buddhas, *Maitreya*.

In modern times Eugene Burnouf has written the first history of Buddhism (in French). *Introduction a la Histoire du*

Boundhisone Indien published in 1844 mainly depending on Nepalese manuscripts on the Enlightened One.

BUDDHISM IN KOREA

In the Far East even today, Korea is one of the important centres of Buddhist faith. Buddhism had touched Korean hearts during the fourth century AD. Those days Korea had three distinctive separate parts, Koguryu in the north, Pakche in the South West and Silla in the South East. Buddhism did not spread throughout Korea simultaneously.

It was some Chinese Buddhist monk who introduced Buddhism to Koguryu. That was in 372 AD. After a decade or so it was introduced to the people of Pakche by Marananda, a Buddhist monk from Central Asia. In the Silla area Buddhism was introduced some three decades later.

Korean Buddhists played an important role as intermediary between China and Japan. Buddhism was highly respected by the people of Korea. It received royal patronage too.

It was during the eleventh century that Korean Buddhism reached its highest stage of philosophical development. That was during the rule of the Wang dynasty. Before that, so far as royal patronage was concerned, it was restricted only to the patronage of the kings of the Silla dynasty. During the rule of the Wang dynasty special religious envoys were sent to China to specialise themselves in Buddhist studies in depth and research on Buddhism. Some of the eminent Buddhist monks who visited China for this purpose from Korea were Yuan Hiao (617-670 AD) and Yi Siang (625-702 AD) of the Houa Yen sect. By the eleventh century, Buddhism which was so long restricted to the royal palaces became faith of the common people specially in the Silla region. That was due to the untiring efforts of the Buddhist preachers like Yi T'ien and P'u Chao and their other team monks. The *Tripitaka*, known in Korea as *Yi Tien Lu* was studied by Korean Buddhist in China before propagating it in Korea.

In modern Korea it is mostly Zen Buddhism that is the popular faith.

BUDDHISM IN INDONESIA

By the beginning of the fifth century AD Buddhism had hardly any influence on the people of Java. The Buddhist monk traveller Fa-hien visited the island roughly during 414 AD. He found Brahmanism flourishing in the land. He clearly recorded "Buddhism in it is not worth mentioning." It was the untiring efforts of the Indian Buddhist monk Gunavarman that Buddhism had its first landing in Indonesia. It not only had its footing, very soon it gained a strong foundation in the land. That was within two decades of Fa-hien, visit to Indonesia.

Earlier, Buddhism was spread at Sumatra, particularly in the kingdom of Sri Vijaya. That is at modern Palembang. Even an inscription show that "the king who ruled Sri Vijaya in 638-684 AD was a Buddhist."

I-tsing who visited India during the last quarter of the seventh century noted in his record that the king of Sri Vijaya as well as the rulers of the neighbouring states favoured Buddhism and that Sri Vijaya was a very important centre of Buddhist learning in the islands of Southern Asia.

There were more than a thousand professional Buddhist priests in Sri Vijaya. These priests had specialised in Buddhism by a special course of study in depth in *Madhya Desa* (that is India).

I-tsing liked the sacred city for its Buddhist touch and spent some time in the city.

A RESUME OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

Bhagwan Buddha himself summed up his teachings in four *Noble Truths* which he described as *Arya Satya* concerning human suffering, the cause of suffering, the destruction of suffering and finally the way that leads to the destruction to human sorrow.

The Buddha did not prescribe severe austerity. He preferred the *Middle Path*. This Middle Path has eight elements and is popularly known throughout the whole world as the Noble Eight-fold Path. The Buddha insisted that if one

practised only these eight principles he would be able to conquer human suffering. These consisted of (1) Right views; (2) Right Aspirations; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Conduct; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; and (8) Right Contemplation.

The Buddha said this was the path that would have always "opened the eyes, bestowed understanding, led to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom to fulfil the will of enlightenment, finally leading to *Nirvana*". *Nirvana*, literally meant the blowing out or extinction of craving of desire for existence in all its forms, and the consequent cessation of human suffering. But it is not mere extinction. It is a tranquil state to be realised by one who from all craving want was free.

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

Buddhism has been described perhaps in the largest number of languages in the world. The details have been described in author's book *The Spirit of Indian Culture : Saints of India*.*

The main holy scripture is *Tripitakas* or the three Baskets consisting of *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma*. Details are not only interesting but are thought provoking.

Buddha's first four collections of discourses are mostly attributed, consist of

Dhammapada

Udara

Itivuttaka and

Khuddakapatha (a short anthology)

SCHISM IN BUDDHISM—MAHAYANA, HINAYANA SCHOOLS

There was a schism immediately after the passing away of the Buddha. Buddhism got divided into *Mahayana* and *Hinayana* Schools. The Mahayana School worship Buddha as a God. Beautiful idols of the Buddha were made for this

*See the *Spirit of Indian Culture : Saints of India* by the Author with a Foreword by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Metropolitan, New Delhi (pages 54-53).

purpose. The *Mahayana* Buddhists lay greatest stress on faith. To them reason was of secondary importance. The *Mahayana* School followed Sanskrit as the religious language. The emphasis was on idol worship and prayer of Buddha. For the *Mahayana* the ultimate aim of life was to go to heaven.

The *Hinayana* School shunned idol worship. They did not subscribe to the idea of accepting the Lord as God but as an ideal spiritual path finder. To the *Hinayana*, the Buddha was the embodiment of perfectness, goodness and who could exercise self control. They believed in reasoning rather than blind faith. The *Hinayana* School accepted *Pali* as the religious language. They did not believe in any rituals nor had any faith either in worship or in prayer. Their emphasis was on purity, simplicity and self-control. The *Hinayana* school had no faith in accepting heaven as the ultimate aim of life. It believed in *Nirvana* which would lead to salvation and getting rid of soul from the burden of life and death.

The final division took place in the Fourth Council during the reign of Kaniska 100(AD). But this could not diminish the importance of Buddhism which played the most important role in world civilisation. Even today Buddhism is one of the leading religions of the world. Buddhism had the brightest days during the rules of Emperor Asoka, Harsha and Kaniska. The highest message of Buddhist religion even today is service to mankind.

THE ORGANISATION

In the *Vinaya Pitaka*—Mahavagga and Chullavagga sections—the Buddha's ideas on organisation has been described in detail. Lord Buddha was perhaps the most outstanding spiritual leader with great organisational capacity and vision. So, more than anything else the outstanding contribution of the Buddha was the formation of disciplines on a scientific line. Actually it was not necessary for him to roam round from door to door to preach his new message. But he could not rest till he saw its impact on the masses. That was why the Buddha formed the *Sangha*. The entire stress was on the welfare of man.

Lord Buddha gave *Sangha* the same status as *Dharma*, the new philosophy. The Buddhist monks and nuns even today throughout the world follow this great Truth. It has formed part of the *mantra*.

The success of the spread of the message of the great saint could be attributed largely to the dynamic activities of the *Sangha*. As a great scholar rightly observed, "The vast expansion of Buddhism both inside and outside India, was in no small measure due to that remarkable institution the *Sangha*, or the order of monks and nuns. The Buddha devoted the major part of his activity to its organisation and it was, thus, his great practical achievement. The institution which became one of the great spiritual forces of the world has lasted across twenty-five centuries to the present day".

Membership of the *Sangha*, it must be noted was open to all irrespective of caste or creed, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, slaves, soldiers. The rights of admission were most simple and involved donning of three orange or yellow robes, ceremonially shaving the head and pronouncing the Three Jewels :

Buddham Sharanam Gachchami

Dhammam Sharanam Gachchami

Sangham Sharanam Gachchami

I go for the refuge to the Buddha, the Doctrine and the *Sangha*.

During the last two thousand five hundred years this great *mantra* must have given solace and peace to thousands of millions of thirsty souls !

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12

Islam in India

Islam is the second largest community representing about 12 per cent of India's total population.

In the cultural heritage of India Islamic philosophers played a unique role. While India has the second largest Muslim population in the world, total strength apart, the role of Muslim in the philosophical, cultural, artistic, musical, and architectural movement, is indeed most significant.

There is no Muslim who is not proud of the great Indian culture which is a composite "born of many strands and colours." The greatest speciality, rather genius, of Indian culture had been, as for the first time pronounced in the Parliament of Religion at Chicago by Swami Vivekananda, has been in assimilation and not dissension. All the same, each component, faith, culture proudly retained its "distinctive flavour and character." Mrs. Gandhi once described "India not as a melting pot but a mosaic."

Prophet Mohammad's teachings "had an instant and revolutionary appeal because of its democratic feelings and messages of equality and brotherhood, of self-help and peace. Human history has few parallels to the rapid advance which Islam made in its formative years."

India is proud that a large number of great religions have added splendour to the existing religions which had its genesis in India. Islam and Christianity are the two major religions of the world that have become part and parcel of Indian life and culture. A year before her death in October 1984, Mrs. Indira Gandhi very happily noted, "Islam for us is an Indian religion. Because of a wholly erroneous division of history—which has been popularised by some writers in the last few decades some of our people tend to equate the advent of Islam in India with the coming of Muslim rulers. In reality the message of Islam permeated parts of our sub continent long before Muslim rulers governed our country, just as Christianity came to us centuries earlier than the armies of Europe. Whatever Kingdoms arose under Muslim dynasties were Indian Kingdoms, empires and a part of the rich and diverse fabric of Indian life and culture. In fact we can say that it were these Kingdoms, these enlightened rulers, who had a large part to play in the weaving of this fabric."

Some of the holiest Muslim Shrines are in India. Like Mecca and the Medina, the Jama Masjid of Delhi, the *Dargah* of Saint Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi, the *Dargah* of Muinuddin Chisti Sahib, the Fatehpur Sikri *Makbara* of Salim Chisti and many other similar holy spots attract daily hundreds of pilgrims from all over the world. In India the visitors are not restricted to the Islamic faith. Hindus, Jains, Christians, Sikhs, join the *urs* festivals with equal zeal.

There are cases where both Hindus and Muslims offer prayer regularly with full faith in the *Pirs*. The tomb of the *Bhakti movement* Saint—who was a Muslim weaver but got initiated by Ramananda and was equally respected by Hindus and Muslims is another holy spot which is visited by both Hindus, Muslim and people of other faiths.

In Bengal village *Satya Pir* is venerated by both Hindus and Muslims. Through centuries the Islam has played a vital role in the experiments of Goa-realisation. It is truly observed, "Islamic elements have interacted with other elements of our land, influencing and being influenced in practically every

branch of human activity, in philosophy and matters of spirit; in statecraft and social organisation; in art, architecture, music and literature, in mathematics, medicine and crafts and technologies; indeed in food we eat, the dress we wear, the very words we speak."

(Mrs. Indira Gandhi's *Speech, Inaugurating International Seminar on Islam's contribution to the Culture and Civilisation of the World, New Delhi, January 28, 1981*)

Islam played a very important role in the growth of cultural heritage of India. The advent of the *sufis* at a time when *Upanishadic* thoughts were at their height brought a happy blending of two great rivers together. It gave certainly a new vigour to the Indian way of thinking. One must remember that long before the Muslim adventurists stormed India, butchered thousands of innocent citizens and indulged in blood baths in different places in India, it was a band of silent frail mystic *Sufi* Saints who crossed over to India in search of peace. They had no intention to conquer. But ultimately they did conquer the hearts of millions who fell at their feet in search of spiritual guidance. They attracted Hindus in thousands. By and by, people came to know what a great store of strength they have brought with them—the great message of peace any harmony. It was no wonder that great land of India, with her deep spiritual moorings was at once attracted to Islam. They revolutionised Indian thinking by infusing a fresh vigour in Indian philosophy. It was indeed a very happy augury—a blending on the *Upanishads* and the great message of the Holy Prophet—universal brotherhood of man. Both the philosophies gave highest priority to dignity of man and oneness of the *Infinite*. So it is historically a fact that before the establishment of Muslim rule, the mystic saints appeared on the scene and spontaneously stole the hearts of millions. They had won the hearts of the masses before the invaders won the battles after bloody wars.

The *Sufis* were received most cordially. They introduced a two way traffic. They gave their best and the highest—the lofty divine message of the *Quran*. They took at the same

time, the best of the existing *yogic* experiments, specially the *Hatha Yoga*.

It is true Islam was not born in India but it is equally true that it sprouted and flourished in India. The great Muslim Saints and Sages had accepted this holy land as their own. India accepted them as a part and parcel of her soul and body. I recall an important *extempore* speech of the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, which touched my heart because we followers of Sri Ramakrishna too follow the same path and share the same views as she did. She said, "It is a matter of pride for us that apart from the great religions that were born in India, other major religions of the world have also found a home here." There is not the slightest hesitation or doubt that Islam has made to the evolution of our composite civilisation. Indian cultural heritage, minus contribution of the *Sufi* Saints and mystics will not reflect the entire soul of modern India. In the words of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who besides being a world famous statesman was perhaps better known for her love for culture. She was deeply drenched in Indian Culture. She observed, "The influence of Islamic saints and divines was much more responsible for the spread of their faith in India than the political power of the rulers. Saints like Nizamuddin Aulia, Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti and Baba Farid had profound influence on leaders of thought in their days and also on the common people. The manner in which Guru Nanak praised them brings this home to us more clearly. The contribution of Islam in the fields of mathematics, astronomy, medicine, architecture, music and our handicrafts is well known."

Without the transmission of the lofty ideas and ideals of the *Sufi* Saints, Indian culture would not have been what it is today. In the large joint family that Mother India runs, the Islamic thoughts and the fellow Muslims have their powerful voice and an important pride of place. They have played and are playing and will play a very significant role in the cultural enrichment of this vast land. It is the moral duty of all Indians to fight unitedly, boldly and strongly against those who want to sow dissensions in this large consolidated composite

united family to achieve their personal gains. All must join and fight these tendencies which create distrust and suspicion.

Mrs. Annie Besant, an eminent foreign lady, was dedicated to the cause of India's freedom. A great European who became an Indian, she had recalled the marvels and miracles achieved by Islam in its first decades in the following words :

"From the eighth century till the fourteenth, in the hand of the children of Islam is gripped the torch of science. Wherever they go they carry learning with them; they conquer, but where they conquer they found schools, universities. The universities of Cairo, of Baghdad, of Cordoba, grew up under the shadow of the Prophet. Christian Europe crowds to Andalusia to learn from the Musalman teacher the elements of forgotten science; they bring astronomy; they translate the *Siddhanta* of India and other books. They invent, what do they not invent ? They take up mathematics from the Hindu and Greek, they discover equations of the second degree, then the quadratic; they discover and invent spherical trigonometry; they study the stars; they measure the size of the earth within a degree or two. They make a new architecture, they discover a new music, they teach scientific agriculture, they bring manufactures to the highest pitch of excellence. But is that all ? No. In philosophy they are still greater. They dive into the very being of Supreme."

There is not the slightest doubt that in the development of finer arts, music, painting, architecture, the Muslim rulers played their unique role. They did it befitting the quality of the edifices. They, for this purpose appointed both Hindu and Muslim architects. Many Muslim architects, without hesitation, took the *Lotus* logo for many important mosques in India. Many of the Muslim emperors had Hindu wives. Akbar the great's wife was Princess Jodhabai. She continued to celebrate the Hindu festivals in the royal palace. There are many instances where the royal palaces held great festivals of *Holi* or *Dewali*.

In music too Mian Tansen, the greatest musician ever born in India had his lessons from a mystic Hindu monk Swami

Haridas who refused to attend royal court. Akbar had to come in disguise to listen to his melodious music to his hermitage. He would not even yield to his repeated repeated requests to accompany him to the great emperor's palace. "My music is not meant for any earthly king or emperor. They are meant only for the King of the World—the great Creator of the Universe."

Similarly in painting there is a regular school of painting—some of the best pieces available in India—known as Mughal School of Painting. The subject matter was never restricted to any particular religion or community.

The Musalmans, both rulers and ordinary individuals, played their unique role in enriching the cultural heritage of India. Even in modern India who have kept up the classical style of music like *Dhrupad* alive? Many of them hail from Musalman families. But they are Indians first, Indians last.

PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM

In a brief description of the message of the Prophet, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said, "God is nearer to you than the artery of your neck."

In one of the most important *Quranic* prayers the Prophet said, "Religion of recognising humbly, respectfully, that there is a superior Being, a higher Reality of which we are all the off shoots." Masnavi in his great book observed; "The moon is in the sky, not in this stream; in this stream what you find is reflection."

Explaining the message of the great Prophet, Dr. Radhakrishnan observed, "the reality is raised above the phenomenal world; it is something which you cannot grasp by merely losing yourself in the manifestations of the world. You have to look above and how you look does not depend upon this dictator or prophet; it depends on the nature of man. It is the *Sufi* poet who said that there are as many ways to God as there are human hearts. There is no one royal road to salvation. There is no stereotyped method by which we can attain the Reality. We have to give absolute elasticity, we have to be hospitable to every kind of direction."

Prophet Mohammad the great, clearly said that God has not refused messenger to any community". Every community has its own messenger and in India, any citizen has the liberty to profess, propagate and practise any religion he wants. Today, more than ever before is the need for the extraordinary illumination, compassion and ever-renewing relevance of the Holy Prophet's teaching. He said : "Unto every one of you, we have given a law and an open path; and if God had pleased, He had surely made you one people. But, He hath thought fit to give you different laws, that he might try you in that which he hath given you respectively. Therefore strive to excel each other in good works; unto God shall ye all return, and then will He declare unto you that concerning which ye have disagreed."

Humility is the greatest sign of real enlightened knowledge. All great Saints, irrespective of their religion were extremely humble in the approach to God-realisation.

In his surpassing humility the Holy Prophet described himself as unlettered. Yet who could be wiser than the person who declared : "Knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not ; it lights the way to heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when bereft of friends—an armour against enemies".

It has been rightly observed, "Through this emphasis on knowledge, on striving, on compassion and on duty, Islam became a great catalyst of worldwide change, building a democratic fraternity, bringing about equality between women and men, and inspiring numerous tribes and sects with the vision of a common human destiny."

Learned scholars on Islamic philosophy will vouchsafe that "Islam does not permit the division of its believers into worldly and religious men, like the laity and the clergy among the Christians." Accordingly the Muslim jurisprudence was framed by scholars of eminence but they possessed "no authority". They did it only on the basis of their own learning. In India quite a large number of institutions, specialised on Islamic studies, are functioning.

When the Islamic thought first came to India, and that was through the great saints who were dedicated to the teachings of the Holy Prophet it had nothing to do with material values. Obviously, the stress was only on the spiritual values. This was particularly important for Indian Islamic philosophy. "The tendency to dissociate religion from political and administrative affairs, to concentrate on the personal aspect of religious life and assert ethical and moral values as against legal prescriptions appeared very early among Muslims. It gradually came to be known as the *Tariqah* to distinguish it from *Shariah* and those who followed it were called *Sufis*".

What does *Sufi* mean? *Sufi* means "a pantheistic Mohammedan mystic." *Pantheism*, as is well known is the doctrine that identifies God with the Universe : the worship of all gods. Normally, a pantheologist specialises in a synthesis of all religions and the knowledge of all Gods. Pantheon, one must recall, is a temple of all gods. There, all the gods are worshipped collectively. So as *Sufi* has always a much wider vision of religion. The Scholars themselves have different viewpoints. "The etymology of this term is uncertain. It may have been derived from *suf*, wool, from *sufia*, wisdom or from *safa*, purity " In the Indian cultural life these *sufis* have played the most significant role in fusing new vigour and force to Indian thinking on God. That was mainly because "The *sufis* not only evolved an intensely personal approach towards God and the spiritual life but, from the eleventh century onwards they began to preach among the masses, enrol *murids* (disciples) in large numbers and establish *khanqahs*, or centres of community living: By the end of the twelfth century, when Islam began to spread in India, there were already several *silsilahs* or orders among the *sufis*."

This *Silsilah* or order was "a system of spiritual succession, every *sufi* who rose to the status of a master *sheikh* or *pir* nominating one principal *Khalifah* or successor and as many *khalifas* as he found worthy among his disciples.

There are historians who believe that the *sufis* lived "an isolated life devoting themselves to the perceiving God." The

orthodox Muslim theologians generally disapproved of their way of life. They found "*sufi* methods and beliefs too unorthodox". At the same time, these learned scholars also clearly admit that "*sufi* ideas attracted sympathy and interest in India, particularly among those who were in any case inclined to mysticism and asceticism. In the centuries immediately following, the impact of the *sufis*, on the devotional cult was considerable".

(Thapar, Romila : *History of India*, Vol. I, p. 264)

As is universally known, there are two dominant sects of Islam—the *Sunnis* and the *Shias*. "The main schism in Islam occurred in its very early days over the rule of succession to the caliphate. The *Shias* wanted it to be hereditary, through Ali, and the *Sunnis* elective. From then various differences developed. It was from the *Shias* that the more divergent sects such as *sufis* and *Dervishes* derived. The *Sunnis* are considered more orthodox."

(*Ibid*, p. 305 footnote)

It was in the tenth century that the *sufis* flourished in Persia, "with their mystical doctrines and union of God achieved through the love of God. They came under attack by orthodox school. The *sufis* had no attraction for temporal power. "They isolated themselves from society, and this disassociation had a historical explanation which is partially pertinent to the Indian situation."

The orthodox school even did not describe the *sufis* as "heretics". That was all the more reason for their seclusion. In India they were cordially received by the masses. The *sufis* with their liberal outlook and catholicity interchanged ideas from *Upanishads*.

In India there were mainly three main orders of *Sufis*. The Chistis, which included the historian Barani and the poet Amir Khusro. They were mainly concentrate in Delhi and Ajmer. Secondly, the followers of Suhrawardi mainly concentrated in Sind and that of Firdausi who had his disciples mainly in Bihar. The *sufis* did not accept the interpretation of the Holy *Quran* by the *ulemas*, whom they considered as

individuals "combining religion with political policy." Similarly the *ulemas* denounced the *sufis* for their liberal viewpoints.

THE CHISTI SILSILA

Almost all the *sufi* saints belong to the lineage of the *chistis*. That is why they have been described as members of the *chisti silsila*. This *chisti silsila* is today a part and parcel of the Indian cultural heritage. They did not restrict their spiritual discourses, sermons or lessons only to the Musalmans. They had a wider outlook. They addressed the whole human-kind.

Why Chisti ? What is Chisti ? Chisti originally derived its root from a famous town in Khorasan. Quite a large number of God-men had assembled here for exchange of spiritual experiences. *Chisti silsila*, by itself has become a sect.

The most important feature of the *Silsila* is that it is almost non-existent in the land of its origin, that is Khorasan. It is no longer flourishing there. Only the name is lingering. So, for all practical purposes the *Chisti silsila* belongs to India. "The *chisti* order of *sufis* is essentially an Indian one. Other branches emanating from the town of Chisti in modern Afghanistan did not survive for long in the Perso—Islamic world."

Among these great *sufi* saints the first name that occurs in anybody's mind—be he a Hindu or Muslim—is Khwaja Muin-uddin Chisti. He laid the foundations of the Chisti order in India and worked out its principle at Ajmer, the seat of Chauhan power. It is indeed a mystery how the saint made Ajmer the capital of Prithivi Raj, the great Chauhan King his seat of the new experiment, particularly at a time when strict vigilance was cast on every foreigner. Huge masses of people—both Hindus and Muslims would visit him for his blessings everyday. It is also observed by some scholars of eminence that even Rai Pithora (that was how Prithviraj Chauhan used to be affectionately addressed) used to come in the darkness of night to seek the holy man's blessings. It was purely the will force of the saint that made him concentrate at Amjer.

Dr. Nizami tells us, "Ajmer was not merely the seat of Chauhan power; it was a religious centre also where thousands of pilgrims assembled from far and near. Shaikh Muinuddin's determination to work out the principles of Islamic mysticism at a place of such political and religious significance shows great confidence." It was a big risky adventure. But the saint had greatly depended on the blessings of the Holy Prophet. It has been truly observed by Dr. Nizami that "on his success or failure in Ajmer depended the future of the Muslim mystic movement in Hindustan. Some of his saints, as recorded by Mir Khurd, supply the quintessence of his religious and social ideology and reveal him as a man of wide sympathies, catholic views and deep humanism."

(Nizami, Dr. K.A. : *Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in India during the Thirteenth Century*, p. 184)

There are scholars who held the view that the Saint first landed at Lahore and finally shifted to Ajmer. Dr. Yusuf Hussain tells us, "From Lahore Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti went to Delhi and then to Ajmer, which was ruled by Rai Prithvi Raj. One cannot think without admiration of this man, almost alone, living among people who considered the least contact with a Muslim as defilement. Sometimes he was refused water to drink. In the torrid climate of Rajputana this was the hardest punishment one can imagine. The high caste priests demanded the Raja of Ajmer that he should banish the Khwaja, whose influence had begun to make itself felt among the lower classes of the place. The Raja sent the order of expulsion through Ram Deo, head of the priests of Ajmer. Legend relates that in approaching the Khwaja, Ram Deo was so much impressed by his personality that he became from that moment, a faithful disciple of the Khwaja and spent the rest of his life in the service of the helpless and down trodden. After the death of Khwaja in 1234, his numerous disciples continued his apostolic work."

(Hussain, Yusuf : *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1957, p. 37)

Among the illustrious disciples of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, Khwaja Nizamuddin Aulia who was by far the greatest,

tells how his *guru* came to India during the reign of Rai Pithora whose capital was at Ajmer and who became extremely popular with the masses. Even legends say that Rai Pithora himself got attracted to the saint. The story about sending priests to extricate him is doubtful. Abul Fazal, the brightest gem of Akbar's court had this to say that the Saint settled himself in Ajmer, lighted innumerable lights and thousands and thousands of people got enlightened from his teachings." According to Abul Fazal's *Aini Akbari*, Hazrat Muinuddin was born in 537 Hizri, i.e. 1142 AD.

What were the main teachings of this great Saint, the pioneer of Islamic light in India ?

One of the close disciples of the Saint who served him and shadowed him constantly in all his journeys—the Saint was a wisely travelled *dervish*—was Muinuddin's right hand Hamuddin Nagauri. He used to take down regular notes also.

The salient features of the teachings of Muinuddin Chisti can compare with those by any Prophet in the world. This can be described as a nine-fold path. They are :

1. One should earn money.
2. One should not borrow money from any one.
3. One should not reveal to anyone nor seek help from any one if one has eaten nothing, even for seven days.
4. If one gains plenty of food, money, grain or clothing, one should not keep anything until the following day.
5. One should not curse anyone if anyone is very hurt, one should pray to God to guide one's enemy towards the right path.
6. If one performs a virtuous deed one should consider that the source of the virtue is due either to one's kindness, to the intercession of the Prophet Mohammad on one's behalf, or to divine mercy.
7. If one performs an evil deed one should consider one's evil self responsible for the action, and try to protect oneself from such deeds. Fearing God one should be

careful to avoid actions which may involve him again in evil.

8. Having fulfilled all the above conditions, one should regularly fast during the day and spend the night in prayer.
9. One should remain quiet, and speak only when it is imperative to do so. The *shariat* makes it unlawful both to talk incessantly and keep totally silent. One should utter only such words as those which please God.

Hazrat Muinuddin Chisti was the brightest gem of Islamic philosophy in India, one of the foremost in the world. He visited Delhi twice. In Delhi he would live only with his equally illustrious disciple Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtyar Kaki. Sultan Iltumish was the ruling emperor of Delhi at that time. Obviously, the door of the royal palace was always open to the Saint. Iltumish, himself a deeply devout Muslim was attracted by the spiritual genius of the *Derbesh* and wanted to offer many gifts including land in Delhi. Everytime, like all other great Saints of India, the Sheikh declined.

The saint used to lead a very simple life. He would use half a cloth for covering the body and the rest half as a *chadar*. He used to live only on one piece of bread.

Today Muinuddin Chisti's tomb at Ajmer is a holy pilgrimage for Muslims, Hindus and others who cover the distance sometimes on foot. On the advice of Abul Fazal, Akbar the great visited the shrine of Muinuddin Chisti. All the philanthropic and philosophic activities of Akbar started only after his visit to the shrine.

Akbar's son Jehangir too visited the shrine. Aurangzeb too paid his obeisance to the saint by his royal presence at the shrine. Aurangzeb did not allow prayer songs as he opposed music vehemently. But on his second visit he requested them to go ahead with the divine music. He was kept spell bound with the musical prayers. He made up for his earlier mistake by offering double the amount.

Even today Muinuddin Chisti is the most popular Muslim Saint—and one of the greatest of all saints—in India. He had a catholic approach to religion. He had a tremendous power of attraction and the masses of people who visited him—Hindus and Muslims alike—looked to him as a god personified. He laid the greatest stress on service to humankind. Once somebody, as usually they used to ask frequently and frankly, asked him about the highest form of devotion to God. The great Saint replied immediately that “it was nothing but redressing the misery of those in distress fulfilling the needs of the helpless ; and feeding the hungry.” Sheikh Sahib always emphasised on developing “*river like* generosity, *sun-like* affection and *earth like* hospitality.” It is indeed so fascinating to observe how the great saint “voice sounded like the echo of the ancient sages and savants of India who as the *Mahabharata* too, in their enlightened knowledge asked people serve man as God—“service to man is service to God.”

Sheikh Muinuddin Chisti's teachings can be compared with the lofty ideas of the *Upanishads* and *Vedanta*.

The saint preached unity of being very similar to the ideas of the *Upanishads*. In adopting this the great saint established an ideological relationship with the main source of Hindu religious thought.

Truly, it has been recorded, “As a working idea in social life, it meant equality of all men, the essential unity of all religions and freedom from all religious prejudices”.

BAKHTIYAR KAKI

Sheikh Bakhtiyar Kaki was a great *Sufi* saint who, inspite of invitations from Emperor of India, Iltumish, preferred his own small indigenous camp and a life of extreme poverty. He was a spiritual guide of many individuals, irrespective of caste or creed.

The Saint hailed from Aush and had his education at Baghdad.

The most important in the realm of Sufi Movement was the meeting between Shaikh Bakhtyar and Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti who made Bakhtyar his disciple in no time. He never

returned to Baghdad. He settled in Multan. He was the spiritual guide and preceptor of Baba Farid.

When he visited Delhi along with Baba Farid, the Emperor invited him. Iltumish himself a spiritual man had great reverence for the Saint about whom he had heard a lot. To this city (of Delhi) flocked eminent Muslim Saints, divines and scholars from all sides and the enlightened and liberal patronage of Sultan Iltumish ordered them a safe haven of refuge."

The Emperor not only invited Shaikh Bhaktyar, he offered him the post of Spiritual Head of the State, a unique honour to any religious individual. The Shaikh refused and preferred to stay with his preceptor Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti at Ajmer.

But when he was leaving for Ajmer thousands of Delhites thronged, headed by the Emperor who begged of him to stay in the capital. The Saint agreed but not as royal guest. Along with him also came Baba Farid. It was a rare opportunity for the citizens of Delhi—Hindus and Muslims alike—to have the rare privilege of having *darshan* and *sermons* of the great *Trinity* of the *Chisti Silsilah*—Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti, Shaikh Bakhtyar Kaki and Shaikh Baba Farid the greatest of all the *Sufi* saints of the whole world.

The *sufi* ideas were acceptable to all. They found a happy blending of the message of the Prophet—the universal brotherhood of man quite similar with the prevalent ideas of the *Upanishads*. Shaikh Bakhtyar finally got settled in Delhi. According to a *sufi* scholar, "As he devoted himself entirely to fasting and praying, in true ascetic fashion, Khwaja Qutbuddin and his family lived in highly impoverished circumstances. Two versions explaining the addition to his name of the word *Kaki* or man of bread, exist and serve to depict the way in which he lived."

According to Amir Khwurd, the Khwaja would on occasions borrow up to thirty *dirhams* (copper coins) from a neighbouring Muslim grocer for household expenses, repaying the money as soon as *futuh* was received. Later he decided to give up earning to suffice his family's needs and a piece of bread

would miraculously appear under his prayer carpet. The grocer asked his spouse to discover from the Khwaja's wife why they no longer borrowed. The wife revealed the secret of the bread's appearance and it never appeared again."

According to a different version the Shaikh had a big family. Sometimes his wife had to borrow from the nearby grocer to feed the family. On one occasion the grocer insulted her and passed sarcastic remarks about the spiritual power of her husband thereby hurting her badly. So she reported everything to the Saint and refused to get anything on credit. The Saint directed his wife to go a corner and just utter *Bismillah*. It was recorded, after uttering the holiest word she would get as much bread as she needed. So the Khwaja became popularly known as *Kaki* as he lived on miraculously received breads alone.

Hauzi Shamsi, a sacred pond was his creation not only for its holy water. This became a centre of cultural discourses of modern intelligentsia. There are many anecdotes about the miraculous power of the Shaikh. His greatest message to mankind was "to assist people who were needy without heeding the result".

Baba Farid, the illustrious disciple would go in for each individual and ask for an amulet. When asked how these amulets served the people so miraculously, the Saint only said with a smile, "The fulfilment of desired belonged to no one. The amulets contain God's name and His words and can be given to the people of any faith."

The Saint told the exact date and time of his passing away much in advance. His divine body had been buried in Delhi-Mehrauli. The famous Qutb Minar built by his illustrious disciple, Emperor, Iltutmish had been named after him. That is the tallest minar in the country befitting the loftiest ideas that the Shaikh had given to Indian culture and philosophy!

BABA FARID, THE SUFI SAINT

Baba Farid flourished during the period (1173 AD—1265 AD). His original full name was Shaikh Fariduddin *Ganji*

Shakar. He was one of the greatest sufi saints of India, next only perhaps to Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti.

It is said about him, that his mother, a great pious lady insisted on her son's keeping long fasts. So that he does not get attracted to any food she would ask him to keep some pebbles into his mouth. Strangely enough these stones would turn on their own into sugar ! This anecdote was known to all who started calling him *Ganji Shakar*, *Shakar* meaning sugar. He is widely known on Baba Farid. He was equally popularly respected by the Hindus, Muslims and later on by the Sikhs. It is said that Guru Nanak Devji used to recite quite frequently beautiful songs in Punjabi on God. Incidentally, Baba Farid was the Father of modern Punjabi literature. Most of them are mystic in nature. Baba Farid's compositions have most respectfully been incorporated in the *Holy Guru Granth Sahibji*, the most sacred scripture of the Sikhs.

Baba Farid's experiments in spirituality has many similarities with those of *Hatha Yogi's*. "His statements had many similarities with those of Guru Nanak, Sri Chaitanya or Kabir or Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa." The saint felt the presence of the Almighty every moment. Dr. K. A. Nizami has written a biography of the Saint. He wrote, "This consciousness of the Divine presence around him was the guide and motive of his active walking life and gave it a transcendent worth. He strove to understand Him, in His dynamic relation to this finite world. This mystic belief in God had a value in terms of human life. It made him citizen of that universal society in which God is the Supreme Intelligence and all human beings His manifestations."

About his enlightenment it has been recorded that Baba Farid got his first training in spirituality from his mother. Then from Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabriji, a great contemporary mystic. Once he was passing through the town, he somehow got attracted by the bright charm of the child. He was too young and on a fast. It was the month of Ramzan. The saint gave a pomegranate which he himself had broken for the child. Because of fast he could not take it but in the evening he found a pomegranate seed still lying on the ground. He

took it at *Ifter*, the fast breaking ceremony. What an experience ! "A great spiritual wave stirred the whole body." Baba Farid looked everywhere for the holy man. The holy one wanted to transmit all his spiritual power to Baba Farid. Much later, the great contemporary other *sufi* saint consoled the young devotee by saying that the transmission did not necessarily need the whole fruit. It must have been done by a single seed.

At 18 he went to Multan, a centre of learning. There the first thing that Farid did was to memorise the whole of the *Holy Quran*. During this period the great spiritual leader of the *Sufi Silsila* Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki came to there to Multan to initiate him. He at once rushed to the mosque at Multan. Somehow, Farid had an intuition that the Saint had come there to initiate him. He at once rushed to the mosque and silently and patiently waited for a meeting with the Saint. Baba Bakhtiyar Kaki asked him his intention. He explained how earnestly he wanted his spiritual shelter and guidance.

Kaki Sahib initiated Baba Farid. It was at Multan itself, then and there. Along with Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid left for Delhi. Bakhtiyar Kaki was eager to get him introduced the disciple to his spiritual guide Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti. He had to wait.

Baba Farid did not believe in miracles. Step by step all the religious disciplines were taught. Now a chance came. Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti visited Delhi for a brief period and noted the spiritual signs of greatness on the face of the young man. He told his own disciple, "Baba Bakhtiyar you have caught a noble falcon which will not build its nest except on the holy tree of Heaven. Farid is a lamp that will illuminate the *silsilah* of the *Durveshes*. Khwaja Muinuddin then asked his disciple to bestow spiritual gifts and blessings on Baba Farid but Shaikh Qutbuddin apologised that in the presence of his master he could not have the courage to bestow anything on him. Thereupon both the saints blessed Baba Farid. It was a unique honour in the history of the '*Chisti Silsilah*'. No saint before him or even after was thus blessed by the Master and the Master of his Master.

A great poem has described this historic spiritual event which ends with the immortal lines

"The entire creation
in fact has been assigned to Thee
by the two Saints who have
bestowed the two worlds on Thee."

One of the greatest messages of Baba Farid was not to neglect two things—time and religion. "Do not consider anything a substitute for religion. There is no compensation for loss of time."

"Make wisdom and solitude your main provision."

Baba Farid was the only saint who had practised the most difficult austerity of *chilla-i-makus*. This is done in a way known only to few. "It requires a man to tie a rope around his feet and remain suspended in a well head down for forty days and nights while both fasting and praying." Baba Farid discovered a lovely mosque in Uch. He took the muazzin into his confidence and performed the *chilla-i-makus*.

When the saint sat in deep meditation for days "birds had built their nests on the body of Shaikh Farid." Whether this was a fact or not, there was not the slightest of doubts that Baba Farid was one of the rarest of saints in India who had practised the severest of penances. Perhaps the only comparable case was that of Lord Mahavira. He had the highest regard for knowledge and self purification.

He could get royal patronages but he preferred even stark starvation. His confidence in the Almighty was most unshakable and firm. His disciples would hear him often musing and muttering the song composed by himself

I die for Thee
I live for Thee O Lord.

Incarnation of Truth, Baba Farid hated lies. He said "do not utter even a truth which resembles a lie."

He belonged to the great lineage of Master Saints who advocated renunciation. Baba Farid said, "The world is ever up to hire us by appearing in variegated colours. It is full of the deadliest poison. He alone escapes it on whom the

preceptor castes his glance of grace." He did cast his glance of grace on his most favourite disciple Shaikh Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia and he did succeed tremendously as a great spiritual pathfinder.

Baba Farid, true to the tradition of Indian Philosophy said Renunciation is the last word. "Do not make brick mansions the seat of thy affection. They are so full of dust of ages that they cannot befriend thee."

Baba Farid said, "The beauty of the body is all vain. It's charms are all useless if through them the love of Lord is not cherished."

Baba Farid insisted, "Prayers and only prayers can bring salvation. Not a moment should be wasted in relaxation."

Finally Baba Farid said, "The world is held by Him and He dwelleth in creation. Knowing this, do not look with disdain on any trivial object ; for He pervadeth all of them" ! This was also the highest teaching of the *Vedanta*.

HAZRAT NIZAMUDDIN AULIA

One of the most popular *Sufi* Saints in India had been Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi. The Saint had a large number of admirers hailing from all religious groups.

Nizamuddin Aulia's gretest quality was his humility. He was there during the period (1238 AD—1325 AD). During the period of his initiation spiritually he did not have money enough even to buy a turban. Dr. Rizvi tells "His mother assisted by her slave girl spun some yarn and a neighbour speedily wove material for a turban. With some sweets he went to (his spiritual preceptor) Maulana Alaud Din who supplemented some food from his own house in order to make a feast. Ali Maula, a great Saint was (also) invited. After the meal, a Maulana took the turban and asked Ali Maula to wrap it around Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia's head. At each winding Shaikh Nizamuddin placed his head at the foot of Shaikh Ali. So touched was the Shaikh that he prophesied Shaikh Nizamuddin's future prominence as a saint. There were two reasons, which prompted this. Ali Maula stated :

firstly, Nizamuddin had prostrated himself before his elders ; and secondly his turban was completely made of cotton without a single silken thread, thus proving his simplicity and piety."

His childhood name was Muhammad. He was a mystic child always exploring in his mind the mysticism behind the creation. He was brought up by his equally religious mother who spent almost all her times in prayers and recitations of the Holy *Quran*. Maulana Usuli and the mother's constant effort took the child altogether in a different world right from the beginning. "The child had been thinking all the time about the invisible power of the Almighty God in seclusion and would try to explore the Truth."

It was indeed at this crucial moment of his life that Muhammad heard about the spiritual power of Baba Farid; an enlightened soul. There was immediately a thrill in the body and soul. Somehow he had an intuition that here was the saviour of mankind and one who could guide him spiritually. Such was his attraction even for the unseen preceptor that after each prayer he would utter the name of Baba Farid.

Gradually, Nizamuddin Aulia qualified himself to take charge of a *Qazi*. He lost his mother, the father died in his childhood. He had hardly any attraction in the householder's life. He became a *dervish*, a wandering monk.

Before her death the pious mother herself guided the son to dedicate himself to the Almighty God. But his heart would not rest till he met directly Baba Farid, who was destined to be his spiritual guide. Strangely enough when Nizamuddin Aulia was so earnestly longing to meet Baba Farid, the latter too was impatiently waiting for him. We may recall the scene as recorded by a contemporary writer :

"He was welcomed with a great deal of honour and warmth by Baba Farid, who offered him a bed in the *Jammat Khana*. Nizamuddin was immediately initiated and his head shaved. This process was accompanied by gentle admonitions from Baba Farid suggesting that he should also lose the conceit he had developed as an *alim*. The Baba urged him to

become fully involved in ascetic exercises on his return to Delhi. Fasting was the first half of the way along the *Sufi* path, said the Baba and prayers and pilgrimages the other." Baba Farid directed Nizamuddin Aulia to continue with his religious studies simultaneously.

Saint Nizamuddin's main message to humankind is *dard*-compassion for all. Baba Farid himself explained in detail a major portion of the Holy *Quran* which he knew by heart.

He had the greatest sympathy for the poor and the suffering lot. His food was the simplest. He ate very little himself. Obviously the priestly class could not appreciate his popularity but they too were amazed at his thrilling discourses with anecdotes.

The Saint's main message was universal compassion. In his own words *Dard*: One must feel for others, One must share his surplus things with the poor. He himself used to run a public kitchen to feed the poor and strangely enough there was never any dearth of food in the kitchen. Hindus and Muslims sat in long lines together to share the food.

Like all realised saints of India, Nizamuddin Aulia stressed the need of inner knowledge by spiritual attainment rather than bookish knowledge of eminence. His most illustrious disciple was Amir Khusro, a poet of eminence. He was very much fond of him. Amir Khusro was a versatile genius. He is not only the father of modern Hindi and Urdu literatures but he is equally highly respected as the innovator of *Sitar*, the string instrument. He was a great Poet with a vast outlook. He popularised the *Panchantantra* in at least three languages. He was so close to the Saint that Nizamuddin Aulia himself said, "when I reach heaven, the Almighty would ask me what have you brought for me?" The disciples said you would say flowers, Sir. The saint said, "No. Wrong, I would say I have got for you a crystal clear heart, symbol of purity—that is the Poet Amir Khusro.

Nizamuddin Aulia was much more popular than the Emperor Ghyasuddin Tughlak. When he was getting a pond dug for public benefit all the workers were conscripted for royal constructional work so that the Saint's works got stopped.

But the workers both Hindus and Muslims, would work for the Saint throughout the night free of charge voluntarily. The pond was still there and its water has medicinal curing effect. There are many anecdotes about his spiritual powers.

Many desired to be buried near the tomb of the Saint. Prominent of those who were fortunate to get their last seats were Princess Jehanaro Begum, Poet Amir Khusro and the greatest Urdu Poet Mirza Ghalib.

SHAIKH SALIM CHISTI

Shaikh Salim Chisti was a powerful sufi saint of *sufi Silsilah*. Throughout North India he was famous for his deep spiritual power. He was the spiritual guide to Akbar the Great, Emperor of India.

It has been recorded that although Akbar had quite a number of wives and was a successful emperor, known for the *Navaratna*, the nine jewels, of the empire and respected for his valour and victories in the battle field, he had one problem. He had no son. So the problem of succession was very much worrying him.

He was a devoted Muslim. He first went to the *Makbara* of great Saint Muinuddin Chisti and offered his earnest prayers. The poor emperor, successful in all walks, of life had the greatest tragedy in his personal life when he lost the twin sons shortly after their birth... "He had long been used to pray at the shrine of Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti at Ajmer and at those of Saint at Delhi for the blessing of a son. There lived in Sikri, 23 miles to the West of Agra another Chisti, Shaikh Salim, to whom Akbar had recourse, and who had promised him that his prayers would be answered."

(Haig Wolseley : *The Cambridge History of India*,
Vol. IV, pp. 101-102)

The Shaikh had real power of performing miracles too and it was known to the nearby people.

Akbar, somehow, had unfailing faith in the saint. So, when he came to know that his earliest Hindu consort, the daughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber was expecting, she

was sent in person to the Saint's hospice at Sikri. Luckily, for both the emperor, the empress and the saint, a child was born (who later on became Emperor Jahangir, 1569). The child was named in honour of the great sufi saint as *Salim*.

Akbar went on foot to Ajmer to pay his obeissance to Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti but on his way spent a fortnight at Fatehpur Sikri with Shaikh Salim Chisti.

Quite a large number of relations and distant relations of the sufi saint made full use of this new development and history record the resentment about their superseding the nobles in the royal court. But such favours were not uncommon. The Emperor had kept child Salim directly under the charge of the spiritual guide. Salim Chisti too had great affection for the child. He would give day to day instructions for his bringing up as a great successful ruler. It was at the direction of Salim Chisti that even the murderer of the great member of the Nine Jewels—Abul Fazal, Raja Bir Singh Bundela was promoted creating resentment in the royal court. This clearly showed the tremendous authority that the Saint had over emperor Akbar.

Prince Salim was being looked after by two special nurses. Their only other job was to put incense in all the royal rooms to remove evil sprits. There was one warning given by the Saint to the Emperor about Salim. The emperor had made the whole arrangement for the comforts of the Saint at Fatehpur Sikri. It became almost a second capital. There was direct link with Agra.

The warning was a most ordinary one. The prince must not hear any music. Emperor Akbar, had no worry. How will the prince hear any music? Who will sing for him? The saint said if the child hears any music it would adversely affect the health of the saint. Music was forbidden even for making the child asleep. But what was destined was bound to happen. The royal maid after burning the incense started single mindedly some devotional hymns. The Prince got attracted to the music which was something new to him. He in fact appreciated it too. Somebody suddenly informed the Emperor that

his spiritual guide was seriously ill. His illness was so sudden and serious that Akbar got worried. The Saint himself told him the reason of his getting ill. He somehow too had his intuition.

Salim Chisti's tomb, even today attracts thousands of pilgrims from far and near. The emperor built a grand tomb which is known today throughout the world for its architectural grandeur. It is made of very chaste marble structure. A little later the south-gateway was replaced by the magnificent portal known as the *Buland Darwaza*, a triumphant archway to commemorate Akbar's conquest of Gujarat. The greatest attraction for all those who visit Agra to see the Taj Mahal is this great tomb of Salim Chisti. They go to see the details of the specially famous architectural design. Indian History record, "Few buildings could furnish a more marked contrast to the one than the tomb of Salim Chisti, situated only at Fatehpur Sikri. Each structure makes a separate appeal, the gateway in view of its size and majestic proportion, the tomb by its casket like appearance and the richness and delicacy of its detail. The date would be 1571 but as it is constructed wholly of white marble it appears to belong to a later period. What, however, has happened is that the original tomb was built of sandstone, as were all the buildings of this time but subsequent devotees, feeling that the shrine of their Saint should be of something more precious than common stone, converted it into its present state of substituting marble for certain parts and covering others over with their slabs of the same material like a veneer. It may therefore be described as an architectural palimpsest."

(Haig, Wolseley : *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV, p. 546*)

SHAIKH NURUDDIN NANDRISHI

A very important name in the *Chisti Silsilah* that commands equal respect both from Muslims and Hindus is that of Shaikh Nuruddin. Hindus called him *Rishi*. Muslims hailed him *Shaikh*. One of the greatest saints of Kashmir, born during the days of Lalleshwari, loved and respected alike by

Hindus and Muslims, was Shaikh Nurud Din. He was affectionately known also as Nand Rishi.

"His ancestors belonged to a noble family of Kishtwar and had emigrated to the valley. His father, Salar Sanz was a pious man and came under the spiritual influence of a Sufi saint Yasman Rishi who arranged his marriage to Sadra Maji. The child of their union was Nand Rishi, the great founder of the order of the *Rishi of Kashmir*."

The Shaikh was greatly influenced by the teachings and personality of Lalleshwari. He had composed songs to her glory describing "Lalla of Padmanpur who had drunk nectar" as an "*Avatar* and *Yogini*". She was his ideal and the saint has prayed to the Almighty, "Oh God, bestow the same spiritual power on me."

According to one authority "he (Nand Rishi) eulogises her spiritual attainments and despairing of surpassing them himself, strives only to equal them." There is no doubt that Lalleshwari had influenced a large number of Sufi saints of contemporary Kashmir and greatest among them was Shaikh Nurud Din or Nand Rishi. It is recorded in the "History of Sufism in Kashmir" that "The personalities of Lalla and Nurud Din are so mixed up that it is impossible to separate them. But there seems little doubt that Nurud Din drew inspiration from Lalla, even if he did not actually become her disciple."

(*Sufism in Kashmir*, p. 147)

Like many great spiritual pathfinders in India the Rishi showed signs of extraordinary feelings of God-realisation right from his childhood. "He held himself aloof from the daily affairs of the family and though apprenticed in several trades, showed no inclination for any one of them. Finally he gave up the world, lived in a cave for twelve years practising austerities and penances which reduced him almost to a skeleton. His fame as a saint and the glory of his spiritual attainments travelled far and wide, attracting to him a great number of followers." They were from both faiths—Hindus and Muslims alike.

Nand Rishi was unlettered. He could not read and write. But to the astonishment of all he would rattle learned poetic pieces spontaneously. These effortless utterances "furnish Kashmiri literature with gems having both a terrestrial as well as celestial meaning. Concise and objective in their approach, they have become stamped in people's memories. They have been collected and preserved in two volumes called the *Rishi Nama* and *Nur Nama*; but because of the transliteration in the Persian alphabet, many of them are not easily deciphered."

Nand Rishi's contribution in the Hindu-Muslim unity has been unique. Like Lalla, the saint did not stress importance on rituals. He insisted on one's being pure-hearted and good to all. He must have experienced enlightenment. As his poems expressed :

The cave seems to me to be a celestial castle
 The quilt seems to me to be a silken garment
 I play with the rats as if they were creatures of good
omen to me
 One year seems to me to be one single hour.

In *Nur Nama*, the saint proclaimed,
 Searching far and wide in vain
 Ló ! I found Him in my own country.

This "celestial castle" this "own country", were nothing but his own heart. The heart must be pure to welcome Him, like Lalla, the saint proclaimed.

Just like Lalleshwari, Nand Rishi did not encourage mechanical muttering of *mantras* as normally done at the guidance of professional priests. Almost in the same language as Lalla, the saint criticised the activities of the priests. These artificial rites lead people nowhere.

Nand Rishi wrote :

I saw a priest blowing out fire,
 Beating a drum to others;
 The priests have nice big turbans on their heads;
 They walk about daintily dressed.
 Dressed in priestly robes they indulge in mutton,
 They run away with cooking pots under their arms.

Like Lalleshwari the saint sarcastically described the artificial prayers and false religious rites by them :

The rosary is like a snake ;
 Thou bendest it on seeing the disciples ;
 Thou hast eaten six platefuls, one like another ;
 If thou art a priest, then who are robbers ?

About the state of affairs prevalent in the State, the saint wrote :

During this Iron Age I found liars prospering,
 In the house of pious I found grief born of poverty.

Both Lalleshwari and Nand Rishi insisted on their disciples truthfulness. Character-building was the first step to God-realisation. That was a great foundation laid by Nand Rishi and his ideal saint Lalleshwari. The dig at the priests eating mutton was mainly because of the influence of Lalleshwari's preaching. The great saint strictly opposed killing of animals and Nand Rishi strongly supported her through his preachings. Both abhorred killing sheep to appease gods. Both brushed aside visits to shrines. Both discouraged their disciples and admirers reciting scriptures like parrots without understanding their true significance and without paying any true devotion.

Like Lalleshwari, Nand Rishi too practised *yogic* exercises, at least the song hinted to that. Just like Lalleshwari, the saint also ridiculed rites without devotion.

By bowing down thou shalt not become a Rishi.
 The pounder in the rice mill did never raise up his head,
 By bathing, the mind will not be clean,
 The fish and otter never ascend the bank.

(Anand Kaul : "*The Life of Nand Rishi*",
Indian Antiquary, 1930)

God realisation cannot come to anybody all of a sudden. One must constantly practise prayers with heart and soul. The saint emphatically observed that a man must offer prayers to God regularly, immediately after he attains the age of reason. It would be absolutely ridiculous to think that one may leave God-realisation for old age. Why so, if one could not turn

towards God in the vigour of youth, how could one do so in old age ?”

Like all sages and seers of the ancient days, Nand Rishi asked his disciples and followers to shun greed. There could be no joy as in renunciation. That has been the last word of Indian philosophy. Nand Rishi joined these great sages when he said :

Desire is like the knotted wood of the forest,
It cannot be made into planks, beams or into cradles;
He who cut and felled it,
Will burn it to ashes.

The whole philosophy of Lalla and Nand Rishi rested on Love. Love has been everything.

“Love and intense devotion to God form the basis of Nurud Din’s utterances. His devotion is complete and exclusive absorption in God and indifference to all except Him. He advocates the suppression of all other preoccupations and the abandonment of worldly cares. The lover, according to Nurud Din, is one who cares neither for spiritual nor fleshy pleasures, but only for the contemplation of the Beloved (God)”

The Saint said :

The lover is he who burns with love
Whose self shines like gold.
When man’s heart lights up with the flame of love,
Then shall he reach la-makan.

Like all saints of the Bhakti movement Nand Rishi proclaimed that one has to completely surrender himself to God to have His revelation. It is only by full identification with Him that one feels His presence. “He is everywhere, not confined to one place or another. All branches of knowledge are nothing but the commentary upon the proclamation of faith. There is no God but Allah. If one truly seeks for God, everything but Allah becomes worthless. One who recognises himself, recognises God. When I was able to recognise my own self, I was able to recognise God; both loss and gain became identical to me and the distinction between life and death disappeared.”

(*Dawad Miskati—Asrarul Abrar*, p. 67)

Like a great enlightened one, Nand Rishi said in *Nur Nama* :

There is one God
 But with a hundred names.
 There is not a single blade of grass,
 Which does not worship Him.
 First I became certain that there is no God but Allah,
 Then I made myself (acquainted) divine revelation
 First I forgot myself and yearned after God
 Then I reached la-maken

(*Nur Nama*, p. 15.)

Like Lalleshwari and the other stalwarts of the Bhakti era, Shaikh Nurud Din felt that God-realisation was a matter of inner search and deepest attachment only to Almighty. He, like Lalla asked his followers to be disciplined first. "True devotion to God lay in leading a disciplined life. It availed men nothing to carry out the rites and rituals of religion in a cold and mechanical manner," he insisted.

Scholars have particularly made note of this significant aspect of the powerful pathfinder. It has been observed "while Nurud Din was influenced by Lalla her influence did not make him a Hindu saint in the guise of a Muslim Rishi. His saying showed that he believed in the fundamental principles of Islam—the unity of God, the day of judgment and reward and punishment. He differed from other Kashmiri Sufis in ignoring orthodoxy, while still emphasising the traditional Sufi path of devotion. To him not mere ritual observances but love, sincerity, humane outlook, and above all personal piety were the basis of religion."

In his History of Kashmir, like Lawrence and Rafiqi, Bamzai also recorded the tremendous impact of the Shaikh on Kashmiris. He noted :

"Shaikh Nurud Din acquired enormous influence over the people of Kashmir and when he passed away at an advanced age, King Zain-ul-Abidin himself was the chief mourner at his funeral. His grave at Tsrar Sharif is an object of pilgrimage, Kashmiris of all religions and communities flocking to it

every year. The extent of the veneration in which his memory has been cherished may be gauged from the fact that nearly four centuries after his death, Atta Muhammad Khan, the Afghan Governor (1808-10) in order to win the sympathy and support of the people of Kashmir, struck coins in the name of Shaikh Nurud Din. No other saint, perhaps in human history, has ever had coins struck in his honour."

In his monumental well documented work on Sufism in Kashmir, Dr. A.Q. Rafiqi asserts, "Shaikh Nurud Din distinguished himself among all the Muslim saints of Kashmir. Jonaraja, the contemporary of the Shaikh, who rarely acknowledges the sanctity of any Muslim described him as the greatest sage of the times. The Shaikh did not concern himself with propagating the faith of Islam. He gave himself to austere penances. For times he subsisted upon wild vegetables, later on he gave them up and sustained on one cup of milk daily. Finally in his last years he is said to have reduced his diet to water alone."

MAIN TEACHINGS OF ISLAM

Islam is a holy expression. "It means literally submission to or acceptance of the will of God Almighty. The general belief of a well informed Musalman is that it is the eternal religion continuously revealed through Prophets sent by God to all the peoples of the earth and that it has attained its final and perfect form in the teachings of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* of the prophet Mohammad."

What are the salient features of this great faith? They are "few and simple". According to Islam, "There is one God, omniscient, omnipotent, the creator of the Universe of time and space, whose law governs all that exists."

One must convincingly believe that "*Quran* is the word of God, revealed to his messenger, the Prophet Mohammad in order to lead mankind on the right path."

The *Kalimah* says, "there is no God but Allah, Mohammad is the Prophet of Allah."

A popular belief of Islamic philosophy is that "there will come the Last Day when God will judge all mankind, and

give to each person the reward and punishment due to him according to his actions. The basic commands of Islam are prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, performance of all that is enjoined and abstinence from what is forbidden, and *Jihad* or striving in the way of God with all the resources at one's disposal."

A devout must offer often, rather everyday, prayers at least five times. These are *fajr* (before sunrise), *zuhr* (after midday), *asr* (before sunset), *maghrib* (after sunset) and *isha* (at night).

A very important aspect of Islam is its well knit unity. Even in offering these prayers which are "obligatory" for any Muslim, they must try to do it in congregations. If it is not possible to offer prayer in congregation everyday, it must be obligatory at least on Fridays.

In the whole month of Ramzan, a Muslim must undertake a fast, "which means total abstinence from all food" and drink from early dawn till the *maghrib* prayer, well after sunset." It must be noted that "to break a fast once undertaken is a serious offence "

Jihad is a much misunderstood and misrepresented expression. It has nothing to do with aggression. *Jihad* means "to ensure that the Muslim dedicates his life to the service of God." Of course he must save his religion from aggression of Islam by any element or force. The most significant teaching of Islam is the dignity to man. The universal brotherhood of man is the greatest of all the teachings of Islam. It says, "the social precepts of Islam include observance of the principles of equality and brotherhood among Muslims or generosity and charity towards those in need, and the earning of one's livelihood through personal labour." Islam strongly opposes exploitation. It says, "exploitation, hoarding and profiteering are condemned and trust in God inculcated. The totality of beliefs and practices is called the *Shariat* (path) of Islam."

Prophet Mohammad noted, "Read in the name of thy Father who created man from a clot of blood." This was the first revelation to Him. It says further, "Read, thy God is

gracious. He taught man with the pen; He taught man who possessed no knowledge."

"The acquisition of knowledge was emphasised as a source of spiritual merit; so was the earning of a livelihood through skilled personal labour."

It would seem this teaching of the Prophet stressed on earning one's own living encouraged trade. Many Mecca people were inspired by this and took it up as a guidance. A scholar on Islam particularly relates this characteristic of trade which attached "prominent families of Mecca" as the main reason for spread of Islam among people whose life was concentrated in towns." This was perhaps the main reason for giving Muslim culture a pronounced urban character.

"The Muslims who came to India apart from the Arabs who settled in Sind and the ancestors of the Moplas of Malabar confined themselves as far as possible to towns." Later on also it was mainly in the cities that a common culture was developed "to which both Muslims and Hindus contributed. The seat of this culture was the court, and it was there that it found its first expression."

INFLUENCE ON HINDU PHILOSOPHY : THE GREAT BHAKTI MOVEMENT

The fusion of ideas of two great religions of the world created an excellent result. The Hindu philosophy got definitely a new vigour. The Islamic saints too derived lofty thoughts of the then prevalent *Upanishadic* ideas. Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote in his *Discovery of India*, "Hinduism as a whole felt the impact of new ideas. Muslim mysticism and *Sufism*, which probably had had its beginnings in neo-platonism, grew.... The idea of the brotherhood of Islam and of the theoretical equality of its adherents made a powerful appeal .. From this ideological impact grew up various movements aiming at a religious synthesis. Each person could take his choice of these or of more popular and simpler forms of worship. He could be a *Vaishnavite* and believe in a personal God and pour out his faith on him. Or more philosophically inclined, he could wander in the tenuous realms of metaphysics and high philosophy."

Both sides benefited by this new fusion. The most significant result of this was the translation of the message of the Holy Prophet. His greatest message has been universal brotherhood of man. The *Sufi* saints had already introduced the substance of the Prophet's message in a familiar style. The impact was tremendous. The ordinary individual who, so long was denied of direct participation in religious activities and was merely a spectator from a distance although he too poor man belonged to this very religious faith got the door of God-realisation open before him.

A direct important historic and immediate reaction of the fusion of Islamic thoughts into Hindu thoughts, specially by the *Sufi* saints was the advent of a great movement throughout whole of north India where all the great Saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya, Ramananda, Dadu, Ravidas, all joined in a great spiritual movement/awakening involving the ordinary individuals in God-realisation. What you needed for this God-realisation was not any sacrificial rites or priestly initiative but a thirst, a great inner urge for knowing the Supreme Lord who is already dwelling in your own heart. The caste system, which had been eroding social justice and denying a major section of the people not only religious activities but also other connected socio economic activities were to be done away with.

This was a glorious movement which brought about a new turn in the cultural history of India and played a unique role in stirring the masses to a fresh intellectual consciousness. This came to be known in our cultural history as the *Bhakti* Movement, undoubtedly a direct result of Hindu-Muslim fusion of the highest religious thoughts.

This spiritual fusion had a far reaching result enriching the cultural heritage of India in varied fields. The Muslims played a unique role in the artistic, aesthetic and literary heritage of India which they took as their own and Indian culture too welcomed them as her own. Thereby it formed a part and parcel of the mainstream of our rich cultural heritage. Recalling the result of the rich fusion, the late Smt. Indira Gandhi observed rightly, "The Hindu-Muslim exchange created famous landmarks in literature, philosophy, architecture, language,

music and art. In his work *Nur Sipahr*, Amir Khusrau makes special mention of Indians as 'the creators of the *Panchatantra*', the immortal story-book of wordly wisdom which was translated into Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Dari. This became famous as the Arabic *Kalilah Damnah*. Professor Mujeeb points out that the translation of the *Upanishads*, made by prince Dara Shikoh was due not merely to literary curiosity but to a passionate search for truth, and he must have felt that in the *Upanishads*, the goal. 'The confluence of the two oceans' had been reached. The famous Hari Mandir of the Sikhs in Amritsar, the Govinda Deva temple of Brindavan, and the Tirumalai Nayak Mahal in Madurai, all reveal influences of Muslim architecture. The age-old plastic idiom of the art of Ajanta yielded to the new laws of symmetry, proportion and spacing from Samarqand and Herat. Muslim builders, in turn absorbed many an insight from Hindu and Buddhist building skills."

This was a golden period in the Cultural history of India. It was not the influence of any outside world culture. It had its genesis in the soil of India. It was initiated by Indians themselves. Hindu and Muslim architects worked shoulder to shoulder and built some of the world famous structures like the Taj Mahal, the Pearl Mosque, the Red Fort, the Jama Masjid during the Mughal period.

There are clear indications that the tallest *minar*, the *Kutub Minar*—built by the Emperor of the slave dynasty Iltutmish and named after the great *Sufi* Saint, his spiritual guide Qutbuddin Bakhtyar Kaki, was constructed by the joint efforts of both Hindu and Muslim architects.

Akbar, the great, himself married a Rajput princess Jodhabai who gave birth to Prince Salim, who succeeded him on the throne with the title Jahangir was much influenced by Hindu Saints. When he invited the *guru* of Tansen the greatest musician ever born in India, Haridas and the saint refused to sing for an emperor (his reply was my songs are meant for God Almighty and God Almighty alone). Akbar himself had gone to listen to his divine music in disguise.

Prince Dara Shikoh, the heir apparent to Shahjehan, the Emperor was much influenced by the *Upanisadic* thoughts and took initiative to get them translated into Persian by appointing 150 Pandits brought from Varanasi who took ten months to complete the holy treatise. This became the world famous *Sar-i-Asrar*. The great philosopher Schopenhaur had expressed his greatest appreciation of the series of *Upanishads* translated from Persian to French. There are thousands of instances of Hindu-Muslim joint efforts to enrich the cultural heritage of India. This has exactly been observed by great many Scholars in both the richest philosophies of India. In International Seminars, these very ideas were reflected and recalled time and again. Only a few years ago at an international seminar on Islam's contribution to the culture and civilisation of the world, it was recalled, "The contact of Islamic and earlier Indian thought gave fillip to two important movements within Islam and Hinduism—namely *Sufism* and the *Bhakti* School. Somewhere in the course of the tentative mutual probings of these two great cultures, the scriptural texts indicating the attributes of God came to be studied with attention. In the words of the *Quran*, one of the main attributes of God is : 'Loftiest in the heavens and the earth' and the *Sufis* strove to conceive this through their own experience. The Southern Vaishnavas liken God to an 'ocean of all nectar-like attributes'. Again, the attributes of God are many, says the *Quran*, in the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, the Kuru patriarch Bhishma teaches the thousand known names of God. According to some of the commentators of the *Quran*, the world itself is but a *tajalli*, or manifestation of His attributes, and the creation of the world a form of emanation. "Behold the Opus of the Lord !" exclaims the *Atharva Veda*.

Sufism leaned heavily on the Quranic concept of *tawakkul*, trust in God, which had its Indian equivalent in *prapatti*. The stream of Ramanuja's *bhakti* commingling with *Sufism* reached its fulfilment in Kabir, who praised Rama-Rahim, and Krishna-Karim, and in the faith propounded by Guru Nanak.

From this kind of interaction of *Sufism* with *Bhakti* emerged several eclectic, egalitarian and reformist orders which gave deep emotional solace to the larger population."

(Speech of Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, while inaugurating *The International Seminar on Islam's Contribution to the Culture and Civilisation of the World, with Special Reference to India*, New Delhi, January, 28, 1981).

India could rightly be proud of the role of Islamic research in the realm of spirituality. She could claim it and rightly so as her own cultural achievement.

Akbar the great himself also experimented a fresh religion *Din ilahi*, where substance from all Indian religions, specially Hinduism and Islam was recited but Indians do not accept anything theoretical. They have the taste of self realized knowledge, be it from Hindu or Muslim saints, so they rejected it.

Prince Dara Shikoh was perhaps one of the first to take up comparative religion. He himself composed a Persian version of the *Ramayana* where in the introduction he had written that he had a clear vision of Lord Rama. Poet Sarmad, the great *sufi* saint who was killed by Aurangzeb expressed in hundreds of his poems clear ideas which he had derived from the *Upanishads*.

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Sikhism

Is Sikhism a religion? How is it different from other religions?

Before answering this pertinent, all important question one must know what religion means. By definition, religion stands for "Practice of sacred rites." It also means "one of the prevalent systems of faith and worship, human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God entitled to obedience (with) effect of such recognition on conduct and mental attitude."

Sikhism is a deep rooted spiritually permeated religion with faith as its rockbed and recognition of superhuman divinity, personified in Nanak, who is "entitled to full obedience." Sikhism is very much one of the prevalent systems of faith and worship where the *Guru* is identified with God. Just like Buddhism or Jainism or Christianity, Sikhism is also definitely a full fledged religion. It is wrong to say that a Sikh "is a member of Hindu community founded as monotheistic sect in Punjab." It would be equally wrong to say that Sikhism is restricted to Punjab only. There is no country in the world where you will not find a Sikh. It is a universal religion. Anybody can, and many Hindus to every day, join prayers in *Gurudwaras*, the Sikh shrines.

In the same family, there could be one brother being a Hindu and another a Sikh. Hindu-Sikh inter religious marriages are also quite common. A notable example was of the *Punjab Kesari*, La'l Lajpat Rai whose mother was a Sikh lady.

Asia has been the birthplace of almost all religious heads, prophets, preachers and preceptors. From the Near East hailed the religious heads belonging to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism, whereas from the Far East, came the founders of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism of Mahayana Group, and Shintoism. It has been the proud record of India in South Asia to have produced some of the oldest and enduring religions of the word such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Sikhism as a religion came into being towards the close of the 15th century.

Sikhism, as a religion, originated in the Undivided Punjab State of India in the late 15th Century. It was founded by Guru Nanak. He was followed by 9 other Gurus. The followers of the 10 Gurus are known as Sikhs. Over 85% of the Sikhs live in the State of Punjab. The remainder are spread in the adjacent Haryana State and the Union Territory of Delhi. They are also scattered all over India. Industrious, enterprising, good travellers and mixers as they are, they are well and prosperously settled in foreign countries such as U.K., Canada, parts of Asia, Africa and in Malaysia.

Sikhism arose as a historical development of the *Bhakti Movement* which began down South in India and was taken to the North in the 11th Century. The *Bhaktas* or devotees believed that God, though known by different names and beyond comprehension, is the one and only reality. All else was *maya* (illusion). The monolithic structure of Hinduism and the division into Castes, based on profession, specifically allocated, were anathema to the *Bhakti Movement*. It also opposed tooth and nail the Brahmin monopoly and the invidious caste system.

The 13th and 14th Centuries not only witnessed the rise of the *Bhakti Movement* but also the transcendence of Muslim *Sufism*. The *Sufis* also believed in singing hymns and medi-

tation under the guidance of a leader. Sikhism, drew its fount of inspiration both from the Hindu *Bhaktas* and Muslim *sufis*.

BIRTH OF KHALSA

The continued persecution by the Moghuls and the brutal execution of two of their revered Gurus, compelled the Sikhs to take to arms. This was given religious sanction when on the *Baisakhi* day of April 13, 1699, Guru Gobind baptised 5 Sikhs into a new fraternity. This he christened as *Khalsa* (pure). To instil valour and make them more martial, the 10th Guru also assigned surnames of *Singh* (lion) to every male sikh and *Kaur* (Lioness) to every sikh woman. Guru Gobind lost four sons, the best of his followers and finally he was himself assassinated at Nanded (Maharashtra) in 1708. Before his death he declared the end of succession of Gurus.

Sikhism forbids representation of God in pictures and Worship of idols. The *Adi Granth* itself became an object of worship and as such is known as *Granth Sahib* (the Granth personified).

The Sikh insistence on community kitchen (eating together) at the *Guru Ka Langar* (Kitchen for Guru) destroyed the traditional Hindu pattern of caste and thereby ushered in a far less rigid social structure.

Sikhism provide a complete list of rituals which are to be observed at the birth of a child, its name ceremony, marriage and death. The *Akal Takht* (the *Throne of the Tireless*) has its own sanctity.

In case of disputes—spiritual or temporal—a conclave is summoned to meet at *Akal Takht*. Resolutions passed at *Akal Takht* have spiritual sanctions.

The sikhs celebrate the birth-days of the first (Guru Nanak) and the last Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) and the martyrdom of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjandev) and the ninth Guru (1eg Bahadur).

Belief in a Sikh state is an article of faith. *Raj Karey ga Khalsa* is usually chanted at the conclusion of every service. This has provided the motivational force for the sikhs.

Sikhism is only five centuries old as compared to other ancient religions in India. It has, however, a dynamic following. The religion is also rid of many time worn cliches. It is based on universal brotherhood. The chief doctrines, as its founder Guru Nanak put it were "Unity of God, brotherhood of man, rejector of caste and futility of idol worship". The strength of the religion lies in its compactness, its universal appeal and the simple teaching of its revered Gurus.

THE CONCEPT OF GURU IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The term *Guru* means a "Hindu Spiritual Teacher". A Guru is revered at par with God. He is the spiritual pathfinder, a guide to inner enlightenment. According to ancient scriptures, "The Guru is the one who enkindles the light of knowledge and leads from the darkness of ignorance to *Jnananjali*, the eye of knowledge of Truth and divinity. It is only through a Guru that one realises Truth face to face. He is "the eye opener." He is above dispute—*dvandatitang*. He is as high as the sky—*Gaganasadrisang*. Without a Guru and without his guidance and grace, nobody can ever achieve God-realisation.

To the Sikhs, Gurus occupy an exalted position. To a Western scholar a "SIKH" means a "Member of Hindu community, founded as a monotheistic sect in 1500 in Punjab." The word is a Sanskrit/Hindi derivative from the word *SISHYA* which means a disciple or a follower. From that wider angle, all those who followed the messages of the great Saints and Savants—from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh—are Sikhs. Although the credit of founding the Sikh religion goes to Guru Nanak Devji, the first of the Gurus, the latter had no intention of founding any separate religion. In fact, he did not believe in any particular religion, Hinduism or Islam. His concept was much exalted and much higher. He believed in and was convinced, after inner enlightenment, that there was only one God. The outer rituals were all redundant and superfluous. That was a rediscovery of the five thousand year old *Vedic* concept which says *Eko devah sarba bhuteshu gurha sarbabyapi sarba bhutantaratma*. There is only one God who

is omniscient. He is the doer of everything. He exists among all. He is all pervading.

Nanak realised this greatest Truth in his deeply drenched spiritual experiments and discovered God in a man's heart. Service to man is service to God. He did not believe in ritual practices. He did not believe in caste system. He introduced many great social reforms which have been strongly campaigned by the builders of modern India. Nanak was the Guru of this movement. He belonged to the whole of India; the whole of India belong to him. All are his followers without any exception. All seekers of truth anywhere in the world are his followers, irrespective of whatever religion profess.

The Sikhs consider today the *Guru Granth Sahibji* as their only spiritual guide. The Granth consist mainly the quintessence of the main scripture of ancient and medieval India. A number of Hindu Saints' compositions have found place of pride in this great epic. The intention in declaring the *Guru Granth Sahib* as the final Guru, was ordained by the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singhji, to ensure that there is no division or clash of leadership in future.

When we talk of the Sikh Gurus, we have to consider their main messages coming down to us like the ones which India has been hearing from the ancient Sages and Seers. In a world, riven by the virus of communalism and sectarianism there is no better time, than today, for the relevance of the immortal messages of the Gurus. They did not preach for the sake of only preaching; they practised them in their own lives.

The Sikh Gurus were extremely disciplined, hardworking, industrious and selfless mendicants who preached the message that renunciation is the only way to God-realisation. The core of contribution of all the ten Gurus is the *Spirit of service to mankind*. Right from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, all the Gurus insisted on service to mankind, in one way or other. One must contribute his individual mite to the development of his neighbours and other earthly creatures who are equally creations of the same God Almighty. In their precepts and approach they all had been simple, precise and practical.

Their principal contribution to the mainstream of Indian national life has been definitely universal brotherhood of man. This has been very much the message of the *Upanishadic* thoughts, preached in modern days, before the whole world, by the great preceptor Swami Vivekananda. This, in brief, has also been the message of *Vedanta*. Sikhism is not different from *Vedanta*. It is so to say, a revival of the same, brought about by Nanak. The door of God-realisation, so long monopolised only by a restricted section of society was opened to all.

The Gurus firmly believed in national integration and each one of them was an exemplar in secularism in his approach to life. They were the forerunners in banishing the barriers of casteism. They were the first to carry to the doorsteps of the masses, the message of equality. They had a wider vision of equality. The core of their message, in one word, was 'Democracy', which has come down to India, as preached right from days of *Rig Veda* it has been clearly pronounced :

Common be your prayers

Common be your ends

Common be your deliberations

Common be your desires

United be your intentions

Perfect be the union among you

(a literal translation of a *Rig Vedic Hymn*)

This only confirmed how Nanak belonged to the lineage of the ancient *Rishis* whose enlightened knowledge as revealed, in the *Vedas*, was reiterated by him. Definitely, Nanak Devji did not read the *Rig Veda*. But this knowledge revealed itself in his innerself out of spiritual experience and self enlightenment. All *Vedic* knowledge is only realised knowledge. Similarly, the highest concept of divinity is in the philosophy of Shankara and there is no doubt about the oneness of God as preached and practised by all the great Saints of our land. *Ekamehadvitiam*—only one God.

The Gurus gave us some basic ideas of freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom even of profession. A man can choose any profession he likes; it should not be restricted to

any class. The foremost contribution of the Sikh Gurus is the call for total eradication of casteism. There should be no division between man and man. God is one, man is one. There cannot be any differentiation or division between one man and another.

A MUCH WIDER CONCEPT

According to the *Cultural Heritage of India*, the place of *Guru* is unique. It records "The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism, is not a set of views or doctrines but a way of life to be lived according to a definite model. It is based not on rules or laws, but upon discipleship. In the career of the disciple the personality of the *Guru* is all along operative, commanding his whole being and shaping his life to its divine issues. Without such a personality there would be no direction in the moral forces of society and, inspite of thousand kinds of knowledge, 'there would still be utter darkness'. There would be no force to connect men with men, and then with God. Everybody would exist for himself in moral isolation like spurious sesames left disolate in the field with a hundred masters to own them. It is the *Guru* who removes the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and gathering them all unto himself, unites them with God."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV*)

It must clearly be understood that this concept of the spiritual guide is not restricted to any particular sect or community according to the Sikh Philosophy. *Sri Rag* recorded "Nanak, the true *Guru* must be such as to unite all men."

Guru Amar Das made it clear that "Such a creative personality must be perfect, because men take after him whom they serve. If the ideal person is imperfect, the society and its individual following him will also get imperfect development. But those who serve the served ones will be saved."

This was the reason why *Guru Nanak* in his infinite wisdom did not nominate his equally qualified son as his spiritual successor. He found *Guru Angad* an ideal pathfinder and spiritual guide. The emphasis was on perfection than any other consideration. The *Guru* is as perfect as God. In fact,

in the real sense he is identified as God incarnate. This is also the description of the Guru in the ancient Hindu concept. He is described as *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and, *Maheshwara*—all combined in one. That is in the *mantra* uttered by all sects of Hinduism. Guru Nanak himself gave expression to this when he said “everybody else is subject to error, only the Guru and God are without error.” According to Guru Arjan, “whoever is seen is defective; without any defect is my true Guru, the *Yogi*.”

A true Guru must destroy all superstitions and defects. That was precisely what the ten Sikh Gurus did. And all of them had finally identified themselves “uniformly one with Nanak.” They never recorded their personal names at the end of the hymns they composed. They always described themselves as *Nanak*. To gain perfection one has to constantly fight with sin and finally overcome it. This perfection comes “till grace touch” one. The Sikh Gurus were perfected “through a constant discipline in knowledge and love, and by experience in the association of their Guru.” It was only when they had been completely attuned to the divine will and were sanctified individuals that they were ordained as the Gurus. And it is felt and one is convinced that “thereafter sins did come to tempt them, but they never gave way, and were always able to overcome them.”

SECULAR THOUGHTS—HALLMARK OF THE SIKH GURUS

The word *Sikh* literally means a disciple—a *Sishya*, a “member of Indian monotheistic sect founded in the sixteenth century.” Hence Sikhism signifies the religious tenets of the Sikhs. In another definition, it has been recorded that a Sikh mean “*Sishya*” indicating the disciples of Guru Gobind Singh following the religion founded by Guru Nanak.

The term is not restricted to any particular section of people as such. Any person, a votary of Guru Nanak, anybody accepting the universality of brotherhood as preached and practised by Nanak, is a Sikh. Their number, at any rate in India alone, will run into millions. People who are strictly speaking Hindus, Muslims or Christians do have the highest

respect for Nanak. And many of them regularly offer prayer to him in the Sikh shrines known as Gurudwaras.

It was in fitness of things that Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore described Guru Nanak Devji as "the teacher of mankind." Muhammad Iqbal wrote in his *Glory*—

"The cry of monotheism was heard
again in the Punjab.

A perfect man woke up India from
her sleep."

In a society where people are fighting against each other being misled by interested people, Guru Nanak's teachings came in as whiff of fresh air and fragrance. In the words of the late Smt. Indira Gandhi, "Guru Nanak's challenging statement, 'There is no Hindu, no Muslim' startled the people of his time, into the realisation of a profound human truth." How true this statement has been even today, centuries later. "If only we can today think of ourselves not merely as Hindus, as Muslims or as Sikhs, but as human beings who have to live and grow with other human beings, how much better we would be."

Explaining the relevance of Guru Nanak Devji's message in modern society, Smt. Gandhi stressed, "when we say that a great teacher is immortal, what we mean is that the truth he revealed were not limited to the conditions of their own time and place but give us strength to overcome our own problems, in our own time and place. Religious intolerance, casteism and superstitions are still our biggest problems and Guru Nanak's teachings are specially relevant to us."

Guru Nanak was so modern in his outlook that even after five hundred years, it would seem that the Guru has been talking to us about our modern problems. His main attack, as a great historian commented, was no blind conventionalism. In this new spiritual reformation and social change, the Guru had the great advantage of having a team of savants spreading similar thoughts. It really created an atmosphere in the whole country for ushering in a welcome change. It fitted in so well a period of intense mental and intellectual fermentation. Hindu

society was already facing onslaughts from within and without. Ramananda (later half of the 14th century AD) established by his personal example that worship of God was not the monopoly of certain castes. Chaitanya Maha Prabhu (1486-1534) preached that all the devotees, irrespective of their castes and origins, were 'equal in the eyes of God. The *Siddhas*, followers of Gorakhnath who claimed to be pure Hindus, did not observe restrictions of food and caste and set up free kitchens like Guru Nanak Devji. Moreover, Buddhism though decadent, was not totally dead. Vallabhacharya (b. 1479) who had taken the cue from Jaya Deva (1100 AD) that ascetism was worthless in comparison to devotion to God in thought, word and deed, stressed the value of *Pusthi Marg* for attaining salvation. Islam and Sufism, which enjoyed the support and patronage of the state were making strides along with the tenets, beliefs and practices which were associated with them.

Guru Nanak was not only far sighted but also prophetic in his vision. It was a strange coincidence that some of the greatest pathfinders of his age—Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Ramananda, Kabir, Sankardeva of Assam simultaneously joined the Guru in decrying caste system. They held no meetings. They had hardly met each other. They did not belong to any particular sect, caste or creed. And yet, out of their realised truth discovered the common quintessence of a religious life—viz. love for mankind. This *Bhakti Movement*, played a very vital role in reshaping the philosophical trend in our thought process. It also gave a new dynamism to our whole rational outlook. This was exactly what happened centuries before their appearance when Mahamati Buddha and Bhagwan Mahavir preached. They did not support the Brahminical rituals. They too revolted against age-old caste system. They ushered in an age of equality. Guru Nanak Devji was one of the greatest champions of social equality.

An idea about the age in which Guru Nanak lived and preached would be necessary for a proper appreciation of his doctrines. It was a period of weak but oppressive Muslim rule, interspersed by Moghal invasions, concomitant with mass

killings, pillage and persecution. The common people were the worst affected. The human soul cried for peace and liberation and ultimately questioned the little understood ritualism and incantations which hampered the liberation of human spirit.

The Guru had realised the divine light. He had in his vision *seen* God face to face, as for instance Sri Ramakrishna had *seen* the Universal Mother. Guru Nanak described that invisible great power. He said, "*Brahma* who came into the world repeating the *Vedas* cannot describe him. *Shiva* and countless gods and goddesses standing at Thy gate praise Thee." Strangely enough this was exactly how our ancient sages had described that great unseen power which they realised in their vision after life long austerity and deep meditation in the caves. The description of God read like this:

If the ocean the inkpot,
 If the great mountains be the ink tablet,
 If the *Kalpa Vriksha* (Wish Tree) be the pen,
 If the world be the sheet of the paper,
 (And) if Goddess of Learning be the writer,
 Yet O Lord ! Your limitless qualities cannot be
 described.

There is a famous song—*Rabindra Sangeet*—composed by Poet Tagore, borrowing the ideas of Guru Nanak. The song, very popular is regularly sung in temples throughout India. It is a regular evening prayer song at Ma Anandmayee Ashram throughout India. It says :

In the disc of the skies,
 The sun and the moon shine as lamps
 The galaxy of stars twinkles alike
 All sephyr is incense, the winds are
 All the woods are bright with flowers,
 Oh, Saviour of the World, Thine adoration
 Is wonderful indeed.

A very great common quality of the Sikh Gurus was that they, almost all composed beautiful poems spontaneously. It came to them like a fountain effortlessly. They became also great poets without in the least being literary ambitious. They

gave some of the gems of literature in their mother tongue. The poems are yet to be translated in their majestic thoughts and depth of spiritual inner message. That none of these Gurus ever had any literary ambition was obvious from the fact that none of them put their initials after the poems. They all signed as Nanak. Unless one is very well versed with the background and details of the songs—each one of which is a hymn—they will mistake all these literary pieces, as the works of great Guru Nanak Devji.

For instance, Guru Teg Bahadur in one of his songs sang spontaneously—

“Why do you go to the forest in search of God ?

He lives in all, is yet ever distant,

He abides with thee too.

As fragrance dwells in a flower.

Or reflection in a mirror,

So does God dwell inside everything,

Seek Him therefore in the heart.”

This great thought of unity among the contemporary galaxy of saints has not escaped the notice of scholars of Indian philosophy. The great savant and philosopher, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan wrote, “The influence of Ramanuja is visible throughout the latter history of Hinduism. The movements of Madhava, Vallbha, Chaitanya, Ramananda, Kabir and Nanak, the reform organisations of Brahminic theistic idealism.”

(Radhakrishnan : *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, p. 670)

The eminent historian Dr. R. C. Majumdar laid stress on the great role of Guru Nanak as an integrator of religious faiths. Majumdar observed, “he (Guru Nanak) spent his whole life in preaching his gospel of universal toleration based on all that was good in Hinduism and Islam. As a matter of fact his mission was to put an end to the conflict of religions.” This was a unique tribute from a veteran historian whose whole life was dedicated to the analysis of the causes and backdrops of the social and economic conflicts of the country during the last five thousand years.

Guru Nanak's main stress was on mutual toleration and understanding. Religion was the last front in which there could be any confrontation. Guru Nanak, himself was an incarnation of humility. Like him, the other Gurus also advocated adoption of humility as the main motto of life. Ego has no place in the life of a seeker of *Truth*. A true disciple must be fearless and according to Guru Nanak, "he is a true disciple who is without hope or fear. He who has no fear of death, is a disciple perfectly harmonized."

The Guru observed :

"Religion consisteth not in mere words, He who looketh on all men as equal is religious. Religion consisteth not in wandering to tombs or places of cremation or sitting in attitudes of contemplation. Religion consisteth not in wandering in foreign countries or in bathing at places of pilgrimages. Abide pure amidst the impurities of the world. Thus shalt find the way of religion."

The path advocated by the Guru was the "middle path between extreme ascetism and pleasure seeking." The Guru exhorted his followers to discard hypocrisy, selfishness and falsehood."

"Make continence thy furnace,
resignation thy goldsmith
understanding thine anvil, divine knowledge thy tools
The fear of God thy bellows, austerities thy fire,
Divine love thy crucible and melt God's name therein.
In such a true mint the world shall be coined.
This is the practice of those on whom God looked
with an eye of favour".

The first message of the Guru was equality, and his second was of love through unity. The Guru assimilated the best elements from all the religions which he came into contact with. He accepted Hinduism but relegated it to a much lower place in his religious experiments. He also accepted the Hindu philosophy of *Karma* and transmigration, the same conception more or less of hell and heaven, human body, soul and God among the Sikhs. But he denied the theory of

incarnation. Though he had respect for the prophets of all the religions, he rejected the supremacy of the Brahamins, and outright denounced caste and untouchability. He equally fervently denounced idolatory and ritualism. He also denied the authority of *Veda* and *Quran*.

Guru Nanak believed in one and formless God and laid great stress on the recitation of His Name. Guru Nanak's description of the relation between God and man is clothed in the language of human love so much so that the formless God virtually become the devotees' personal God. Guru Nanak assigned a very high place to the Guru, the pathfinder, the meditator, who is the real link between an individual and God. It is through the Guru that a devotee will reach the proper path of God-realisation which will ultimately lead him to love all mankind. Like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa in our own age, Guru Nanak insisted on mutual respect and deep love for man. That is possible. Again like the modern saint, Guru Nanak felt that without a deep yearning for God, none can get that heavenly nectar. And for that one has to hone his mind keen to the Lord as Lotus loves water. He observed :

Love the Lord as Lotus love the water
Even though with waves, the lotus is lashed
yet it does not abandon its love,
Instead blooms all the more.

His desire for the vision of God was so intense. He clearly repeated that life without *Hari*, that is God, would be meaningless. *Mai Hari bin raha na jai* ! He sang in another song, "Oh Lord I cannot live away in separation from Thee any longer." The Guru insisted on being honest to the core. He would not even touch anything from anybody if that was earned through dishonest means.

To draw an allusion, once some businessmen wanted to offer Sri Ramakrishna an amount big enough to support the Saint for whole life even through the interest earned therefrom. Immediately, Sri Ramakrishna quoted the incident when the good supplied by a dishonest businessman turned into blood when Nanak took it in his hand. Similarly when he

took food from an honest carpenter it turned into milk when he took it in his hand. Honesty, hard work, keen attachment to God, service to mankind were some of the major messages of Guru Nanak that needed proper presentation and transmission to the whole world.

On the occasion of the fifth centenary celebration of the Guru in April 1969, the then President Zakir Hussain rightly observed : "The task (of spreading the message of universal brotherhood of man) which Guru Nanak began has not yet finished. It is our duty to continue his work until our life has become the ideal worthy of association of saints."

(*Zakir Hussain's Speeches*, pp. 194-197)

Guru Nanak defined an ideal man as "He who is true is contended, who is kind to everyone, and is devoid of greed and hatred, is not bigoted, has no evil desire, has controlled his self, knows right from wrong and has placed himself physically as well as spiritually at the disposal of God and who has cultivated the habit of following his dictates, such a balanced man has become worthy of being the Guru's disciple."

Almost all Gurus organised regular services to the poor. Even today the main activity of the Sikh Gurudwaras throughout the world is to organise community lunch, feeding the poor and rendering other social services to the needy. This is done irrespective of religion or caste of the recipients. Another aspect of service—to inculcate a spirit of humility among the devotees—is to clean the shoes of the devotees. This is intended to get away with one's ego. A very significant message of all the Gurus has been the stress on self reliance. A Sikh is to earn his own daily bread. The Sikhs are a very hard working community. They are not afraid of risking the spirit of adventure and they are spread all over the world. The Sikh Gurus laid great stress on character building, "man's uplift, not on such short cuts as *mantras*, miracles or mysteries but on man's own humanity, his own character, as it is character alone—the character already formed—which helps us in moral crises." It is considered

that all the ten Gurus had contributed their share in founding the Sikh religion "since it was gradually evolved over a period of about two centuries. Each Guru from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh, contributed his share to its development."

The opportunity of God-realisation was thrown open to all classes of people. This has been the theme of the hymns by the Gurus—Nanak's *Sri Rag* or *Asa-di-Var*, *Arjan's Jaitisri*, Amar Das's *Bhairon*, all wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all classes of people. For instance, in one hymn, Nanak noted :

"There are lowest men among the low caste,
Nanak I shall go with them.
What have I got to do with the great ?
God's eye of merey falls on those
who take care of the lonely.
It is mere nonsense to observe caste
and to feel proud over grand names."

The same spirit permeated throughout Guru Gobind Singh's talk of equality of all castes, irrespective of birth. In *Akal Ustat* he said quite boldly "Recognise all human nature as one."

The Sikh gurus definitely made an improvement on the prevalent idea of declaring that "the whole humanity was one and that a man was to be honoured not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed but because he was a man, an emanation from God, who had given him the same senses and the same soul as to other man."

(*Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 319)

According to Sikhism "the ultimate source of all that is in us is God alone. Without Him, there is no strength in us. Nobody, not even the evil man, can say that he can do anything independent of God. Everything moves within the providential domain." This statement is very near the realisation of the modern Saint Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa who also confirmed that "nothing moves in this universe without His wishes ; not a leaf of a tree will ever stir without His desire."

Guru Ramdas observed :

“There art a river in which all beings move :
There is none but Thee around them
All living things are playing within Thee.”

In *Japji* Guru Nanak noted, “Man may run counter to what is considered good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of God’s will. “But the alternate of doing good to bad is left in the hands of man himself. He is given free will. He is free to do evil to good actions, to think good or evil thoughts and to go, in consequence to heaven or hell.”

Man must assert himself. Only through self assertion does a man get his individuality. This self assertion comes from man to man. The will of God-realisation determines his conduct according to his antecedents. According to Nanak it would be a great disease but its remedy also lay within itself. “God sends his grace to man, and he begins to obey the call of the Guru. That is the only cure—God’s grace, His mercy. There is no third force.” The Gurus, time and again reiterated that when a man does an evil work he is not guided by any third external agency. “It is our own sense of ego placed by God in us. It is the overwinning sense of self that grows as a barrier between God and man, and keeps him wandefing from sin to sin. The bride and the bridegroom live together with a partition of ego between them.”

Everything is within our hearts. “It is like the light of the sun over forest, but shut out of our sight by the cloud of ignorance and selfishness. We sin as long as this light remains hidden from us, and everything to us; regeneration comes when, at the call of grace, we begin to subject our tiny self to the highest self, that is, God and our own will is gradually attuned to His supreme just, until we feel and move just as He wishes us to feel and move.”

In *Japji* there is an explanation of this good or evil work. “Really the problem of good and evil is the problem of union and disunion with God.” Guru Nanak observed, “By the force of union we meet God and enjoy Him even with this body. And by the force we break away from Him. But, for Nanak, it is possible to be united again.”

“Man is born with divine elements. It is through culturing the good elements that man can get divine power. This needs an ideal drill.” “He should always speak the truth and never tell lies. A man should beware even of an unconscious sin and he should not step on to the bed of another’s wife even in a dream.”

The individuals could get their ideas and lessons from the Gurus. Nanak himself made it clear. He said, “everybody else is subject to error, only the Guru, and God are without error.”

The Guru’s superstitions and defects are all destroyed by the spiritual drill. Finally they reach a stage where “sins did come to tempt them, but they never gave way, and were always able to overcome them. This was a constant discipline. It was only through this great disciplined life that they turned to be perfect examples of man and “transferred those who came under their influence into veritable angelic beings.”

Each of Guru’s life read like a story. The hardwork they themselves undertook to reach their goal was most exemplary. That was basically to reach the people in their own cause of spiritual development. They did reach their destinations and perhaps more than what they themselves desired. The Guru made qualities and qualifications most essential prerequisites for running the organisation. Guru Nanak did not pass on spiritual leadership to his son because he considered Angad more qualified than his own son. It has been recorded, “Guru Nanak proclaimed the occasion as if it was a reward for service. He had the same light, the same method, the master merely changed his body.”

In the words of Guru Govind Singh, “All (The Gurus) take them as different from one another’s; very few recognise them as one in spirit. But only those realise perfection who do recognise them as one.”

As regards reaching this stage of sainthood the best way of leading a religious life is through *Shabad*. That is the utterance of the Holy Name. “In this world the best practice is of the Word.” A Guru clearly said, “My yoga is practised by singing thy hymns.” A contemporary writer wrote about

Sikh Guru, "The only way of worship with them is that they read hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments."

This is the practice even today in the Golden Temple of Amritsar. There is nothing but continuous singing of hymns day and night. "The Guru is a Sikh, and the Sikh who practices the Gurus' word is at one with the Guru."

The tenets of the Sikh religion is contained in the *Guru Granth Sahib* which teaches men to love one another. It says, "We should love God and his sons. By following this path alone can we become dear to God."

The Sikh Gurus were secular to the core. Throughout his sojourn in India and abroad, Guru Nanak had one constant companion, a Muslim disciple—Mardana. The Guru's hard work was most exemplary. Each of them left a distinct mark of foot print on the sands of time. Angad introduced *Gurumukhi*, the holy script of the Guru. This holy alphabet is the sacred script of the Sikhs.

The third Guru, Amardas organised the whole group and spread the message of the Master. He popularised *Langar* or free kitchen already introduced by Guru Nanak. This institution of free kitchen, still popular throughout India, has played the most important role not only in feeding the common men, but more to the elimination of the age old caste system. Guru Ramdas was extremely hard working. He started the construction of *Harmandir Sahib*, the famous Golden Temple.

Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru's most important work was the compilation of the *Adi Granth Sahib* in 1604. He was one of the finest poets of contemporary India. He spread the divine message of love through beautiful hymns. Guru Har Govind, the sixth Guru introduced *fakiri* against *amiri*, in keeping with the motto of simple living and high thinking against lust for materialistic wealth and money. Har Rai, the seventh Guru, was the grandson of Guru Har Govind. He was a friend of Dara Shikoh, the moghul prince and son of Shah Jehan. He was opposed, tooth and nail, by Aurangazeb. His son Hari Kishan became the eighth Guru when he was hardly five. He

was summoned to Delhi by the emperor and died in Delhi at the early age of eight. Guru Teg Bahadur the ninth Guru was beheaded because of his refusal to change religion ordered by the Moghul emperor. That was mainly the reason why the tenth Guru placed the Sikhs very much in a semi military condition. The principles of the Muslim rulers, specially the fanatical policies of Aurangazeb would have changed the real religious face of India but for Guru Gobind Singh. He saved not only the Sikhs but also the Hindus. It has been recorded how Guru Govind Singh saved the lives of the Kashmiri Pandits who were being harassed by the rulers. His secular thinking was directed to "Recognise all human nature as one" Guru Govind Singh noted, "Mankind belongs to one." He again said, "Whether it is from the *Quran* or from *Puranas*, the truth is the same."

Guru Govind Singh combined in himself the practical approach to life as a General and at the same time the wisdom of an enlightened sage. He noted "He (God) is manifested in everything. The element is the same, just like the sparks of the fire coming out of fire and finally mingling into it. As dust grows out of dust and mingles in dust, as the ripples of water mingle into water, just like that, the great creator manifests Himself in everything and finally mingles in Himself. The Gurus, specially Guru Nanak, preached the immortal message of the ancient Indian culture, both in India and abroad. The concept of *Sangat* or the Holy congregation was popularised throughout the world. That was a medium to create an atmosphere of brotherhood of mankind. No prejudices, colour bar, no distinction between the rich and the poor were allowed. That was because all the Gurus basically were convinced that all human beings were children of God. To get enlightenment, the Gurus insisted men could get spiritual greatness and oneness with God only through love and devotion.

The greatest qualities of man—devotion, dedication, service to humanity, mutual love, compassion—all these had been advocated by all the Sikh Gurus. Hatred, malice, anger are to be eschewed. Discrimination between rich and poor have to be abandoned.

The Sikh religion is living and dynamic. It is, in fact a universal faith. Guru Govind Singh observed :

All men are the same although they appear different under different influences.

The bright and the dark

The ugly and the beautiful

The Hindus and the Muslims have developed themselves

According to the fashions of different countries

All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body,

And the same build -

A compound of the same four elements.

There cannot be a better appreciation of unity of universal brotherhood. To the Gurus, the Holy Name is the most important factor of God-Realisation. Guru Nanak noted :

Without the wealth of *Nam*, all else is futile

Attachment, ego, pride, they burn you all.

True wealth through Gurus' grace alone is gained

Coming and going, worldly wealth is like the shade of a tree

The wealth of the world leads to untold misery.

Neither can it be accumulated

Nor can it accomplish you beyond.

The Guru repeatedly insisted on his disciples to be self-reliant. He guided them to earn their living and sharing the fruits of hard labour with all. He said,

If a saint or a seer goes begging,

Go not near him

Nor fall at his feet :

The one who earns his own living,

And part that offers as charity

He alone knows the secret of the path.

Charity is an integral part of the Sikh religion. One must part a fraction of his income for regular charity. Only through self-culture and complete surrender can one attain inner enlightenment. Guru Ram Das observed : The human body is the rarest of gems and rubies; there await thee. Acquire them by devotion and service to *Satguru*.

It would not be necessary the Gurus observed, to run after temples or mosques. Equally, it was not necessary to trek long distance in search of truth. Everything can be attained in one's own heart which is the citadel of God. Guru Amar Das pointed out :

"In thy body is everything
Higher
In thy body resideth the Almighty Lord Himself
who sustaineth all
In thy body are gems, rubies and store house of devotion
In this body is the treasure of *Nam*
The word of God.
Which by the grace of Guru is obtained."

The place of the Guru is the highest in all religions. It is the supreme in the Sikh religion. Guru Nanak observed :

"Guru who is God, do thou worship
with all thy heart and soul
For giveth he life and faith
and sustaineth he all."

The Gurus explained the meaninglessness of pomp and power and guided the disciples to the path of renunciation. Guru Govind Singh noted :

"Emperors before whom, strong armed king did meekly
bow their heads, in countless numbers,
who possessed great elephants with golden trappings,
proud and painted with brilliant colours,
Millions of horses swifter than the wind,
which bounded often the world
What mattered it now, mighty were those emperors
All at last went hence with nothing bare of foot !"

This spirit of complete renunciation is the crux of the Indian philosophy. This immortal message is the guiding star to the entire Universe, a world busy in self-destruction through nuclear wars.

The world is only transient, a temporary Caravan's camp. We shall all have to think only of the only true destiny, that is the citadel of God.

Guru Nanak said :

“Birth and death is the law of life :

O Brother we come and go according to Divine command”.

Guru Arjun described it in a more poetic way when he observed :

“At sunset the birds gather in the branches

Some chirp shrilling, some sing sweetly

At sunrise again they fly away.”

“This world is like an inn, where people come from all directions to spend the night. But with the coming of the dawn, each one goes his own way.”

So one has to get the best out of this temporal life. And that is possible only through the blessings of the Guru. Guru Nanak observed :

“By changing the ocean of the body, a marvel have I beheld. *Guru is God* and *God is Guru*, between them there is no difference.” One must not forget. Lord Christ also said, “I and the Father are one.”

To get enlightenment one must give up pride and egotism. The *Satguru* says “Those who have destroyed self-will and live in humility, they, the meek are happy. The haughty, are consumed O Nanak, as in a furnace by the fire of their own pride.” In the words of Guru Teg Bahadur “From sin, He is the redeemer; of the lost he is the guide. Once a man gets divine blessings he would not ask for anything else.”

Guru Ram Das observed :

“Mankind runs after salvation,

heavens and paradises

ceaseless is its yearning

But lovers of the Lord ask not even for salvation

They are satisfied with His presence only.”

This spirit of dedication and renunciation can be cultured in the company of good men—the holy ones, that is known as *Satsang*. Guru Arjun noted: “Among all men that is foremost who in the company of the saints destroys his self attachment. He who sublimates himself, the lowest of the low, shall be deemed the highest.

Worldly goods, always dissuade man from the right path. "Man lives like a hypocrite, a victim of his own acts." Guru Amar Das said, "Man is destroyed by worldly attachments". Those who do not cherish the Lord's name wander, deceived and bewildered without the love, his Eternal being, man can have no destiny except remorse and anguish. According to Guru Nanak "complete surrender is necessary. He is the only saviour in the world. One must get His blessings."

Similarly Guru Arjun observed, 'when a man is in dire straits, and there comes none to help him. When he has lost all hope and help let him only set his mind on the Lord and no harm shall touch him'. This can be achieved only through constant devotion to the Almighty God. Guru Ram Das noted :

"Constant devotion alone can win His love
Like a *Chatak*, the rain bird, that prays
for rain, we should long for a drop of Nectar."

In the Holy *Gita* it is said that *Bhakta* (the devotee) *Bhagwat* (the holy scripture) and *Bhagwan* (God) are three in one and one in three. Similarly, Guru Nanak observed, "O be thou the slave of the slaves of the master who hath kept devotion to the Lord." The Guru added, "He indeed is a *fakir*, a saint or a perfect master who has subdued his own self, who harms no living thing and overflows with compassion." For that, one must concentrate only in the *Holy Name*. The Guru exhorted, "Not by pilgrimage is cured the malady of selfishness. Pilgrimage, penances and compassion brings little merit, the size of a sessame seed. But he who hears and believes and loves the *Name*, shall bathe and make clean in a place of pilgrimage within him."

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Christianity in India

Christianity is a part and parcel of Indian culture. It constitutes the third largest community with about 2.5 per cent of India's total population.

Like Islam, Christianity too came to India long before the alien rulers came and took charge of administration. Today we have more than 160 million Christians in India.

In the Indian Parliament the late Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru emphatically observed on March 31, 1955, "Christianity is a very old religion of India."

Christianity reached India long before it had spread to Europe beyond Greece. The exact year of its introduction is, however, a point of dispute. There is a legend that Thomas Didymus, the Apostle visited the court of Indian ruler (the Indo-Parthian King Gondophernes of Taxila) somewhere about 50 A.C. According to this legend he first preached the Gospel in Parthia, then in north-western India and came by sea to Malabar.

The earliest Christian community of India comes from Malabar and this is certain that this new religion was peacefully settled there by the second century A.C. The new religion was not only tolerated and allowed to be freely propagated but the converts—also continued to become an integral part of the

country and the people. Furthermore, there was an active exchange of ideas regarding theology and spiritual experiences between the missionaries of new faith and the priests and saints of different Hindu cults and sects. As a result Hellenistic-Christian Mysticism of the near East gained much from India as some of the Indian mystic cults were probably influenced by Christianity. It was once even believed that the *Bhakti* cult was developed under the influence of Christianity in the first two centuries A.C. While this is no longer held to be correct Christianity as an ancient religion of India remains a fact. The *Bhakti* cult must have been greatly influenced both by the *Sufi* Saints and the Christian missionaries who assigned highest priority to love for God-realisation.

A PART OF THE MAINSTREAM

There is a common touch among all Godmen in India. Surprisingly they have all been spreading the message of LOVE. No religion ever preaches mutual hatred or mistrust. That is the beauty of the soil. Almost all religious ideas were born in India. The major religions of the land—Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh had their origin in India. Among the most important other major religious groups are Islam and Christianity. Both these major religions had come through great saints who became part and parcel of the Indian society. They spread the noble ideas of the Almighty. The first saint who spread actively the message of the Holy Prophet was Muinuddin Chisti who came to India and never returned home. He made India his home. India embraced him as a loving son. Today the saint occupies a very high place in the cultural history of the land as the pioneer who preached the universal brotherhood of man, the highest message of the Prophet. Islam is the second largest popular faith. Hazrat Muinuddin Chisti is loved, respected and worshipped not only by the Muslims as in tune with cultural harmony of the land, the saint is also an object of great esteem to people from all other faiths. Today in his *urs* at Ajmer thousands from all religious groups throng to pay homage to the saint.

Christianity has come to be a living religion in India. Christians have been playing equally important roles in the

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cultural synthesis of this great land of unity in diversity. Not only that Christians are attached to the Lord, the holy message of Christ influenced the lives, works and philosophies of some of the greatest saints of the land—past and present. Great saints like Madhvacharya talked about “eternal hell”, a description never discussed in earlier thoughts and proved beyond doubt the influence of contemporary Christian missionaries carrying the message of Christ on the coastal lands. Of present generations, majority of the saints, including Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda had been following the teachings of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna, who Himself practised all major religions of the world regularly prayed before Him. There used to be a picture of Christ and Buddha, each regularly worshipped by the saint, in His dwelling apartment at Dakshineswar, near Calcutta.

India is proud to have the touch of this great saint who in the whole world was “the first person to explicitly acknowledged Christ’s divinity.”

He was a wandering minstrel of God. He left for Khurasan from where he came to India. He is recognised as the founder of the Church of the Syrian Malabar Christians, or Christians of *St. Thomas*. Among his most popular work is the *Gospel of Thomas*. The most authentic biography of the saint is perhaps A.E. Medlycott’s *India and Apostle Thomas*.

According to available material St. Thomas came to India in AD 52. He “came to Malabar after preaching to the inhabitants of the island of Sumatra and establishing there Christian community, and he landed at the ancient port of Cranganore—Mayiri Khodu or Muziris of Ptolemy and the Periplus in AD 52”. This is only according to traditions and Medlycott in his *Saint Thomas Christians* writes, “these Christians had no written records of ancient history, but relied entirely on traditions handed down by their elders and to these they are most tenaciously attached.”

In India, it was mainly in Kerala where the saint limited his activities. It was mainly in the coastal areas where Jewish merchants would concentrate, that the great saint would spread the message of the Master.

The intention of his visit to India was not to convert anybody. He was accompanying Habban an Indian merchant to Indian soil. Juda Thomas was an expert carpenter. Before coming to India he was imprisoned at Khorasan for spending the money given, perhaps as advance towards some building in charity. That might have also been the reason for the good hearted man to leave that country. In any case, Saint Thomas's visit to India was a great event in the cultural renaissance of the land. A happy blending of all higher thoughts always lend a new vigour to the existing philosophy of life of any nation.

There are some scholars who believe that Saint Thomas came to India much earlier than 52 AD. May be there is some truth in it. According to this School the saint first came to Punjab. "St. Thomas may have preached the *Gospel* and founded the Church in Persia long before he accompanied Habban to the Parthian Kingdom of the Punjab. For if, as scholars believe, he came to India in AD 48 or 49, there is a gap of about fifteen years in the Apostle's life to be accounted for. Could we not presume that he spent years in the field originally assigned to him? How else can we explain the existence from the earliest times of Christian communities in Persia with a Metropolitan Bishop in the Province of Fars and Bishops in the various islands of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea? How else can we explain the stand taken by this Metropolitan and Bishops of the region when they refused to accept directives from the Patriarch of Seleucia-Cresiphon on the ground that they are 'the disciples of the Apostle Thomas and have nothing in common with the see of Man's' (that the Patriarch) exactly like the Syrian Christians of Malabar? We may find a common link between these two Christianities of St. Thomas in that, till the end of the 8th century the Metropolitan of Fars exercised jurisdiction over the Malabar Christians as well."

(*The Catholic Church in India—
A Historical Sketch*, page 5)

During his stay for more than twenty years the saint had endeared himself with the local Indian masses. He dressed

like an Indian *Sanyasi*. He served all, particularly the poor, irrespective of caste or creed. He was extremely popular with whosoever he came in touch and it was but obvious that the local priestly class did not see eye to eye with him on that account. They considered him as a strong rival and wanted to be-little him by even poisoning the ears of the ordinary men.

Some scholars have come out with the theory that Saint Thomas first came to Punjab and not Kerala. They have come out with their arguments which are equally valid. That is not however mentioned in the most authentic records. *Acts of Thomas* say the otherway round.

According to all sources available, St. Thomas came to India along with an Indian merchant Habban. *Acts of Thomas* records tell us "Then a certain merchant, an Indian, called Habban 'happened to come into the south country sent by Gudnaphar to procure for him skilful carpenter. Our Lord appeared to Habban and sold St. Thomas to him for twenty pieces of silver. Travelling by ship they put in at the town of Sandaruk. They disembarked at this port, and attended the wedding of the King's only daughter. At the wedding they see a Hebrew girl playing the flute and St. Thomas ultimately converts the bride and bridegroom."

(*A History of Christianity in India*, pages 25-26)

There is so great a similarity between an Indian Saint's life and the lives of Saint Thomas and great Chisti of Ajmer that an ordinary, even unlettered Indian would not care even to know whether he is a Muslim, or a Christian or a Hindu. An ordinary Indian Truth Seeker is attracted by the spirit of spiritual adventure and he would invariably automatically surrender himself at his feet and ask for his guidance. The curiosity for the unknown, the love for the unexplored, the attachment to the very divine thought is so much ingrained in the mind of an ordinary Indian, is so irresistible, that as in a flood he is emotionally and immediately carried away by the new wave. He takes the pathfinder as his own.

So long, the saint was preaching to the Jewish merchants in India who were "numerous" in Malankara near Musiris.

Quite a number of Nambudiri Brahmins came under his influence here. "We may take it that he did not engage in philosophical discussions, which may be the native element of the race but which was alien to a Palestinian like Thomas." Normally, in India, there are religious debates and detailed discussions and whoever is defeated in arguments accept the faith of the victor. In this particular case it was not so. It seemed the saint won them over by showing them some miracles. History also confirmed that. It was recorded clearly, "The tradition is that he won them over by performing a miracle which proved that the God of the Jewish *Sadhu* was mightier than their own. It is a pretty story."

The story may be recalled in brief.

"Passing by the city of Palur, a Brahminical stronghold, early in the morning he found a large number of *Brahmins* bathing in the tank of the temple chanting *Vedic* verses and throwing water into the air. Asked why they were doing this, they said it was an offering to the Gods. "In that case," the Apostle said, "Your offerings do not seem to be acceptable to them. Otherwise the water would not have fallen back into the tank."

"The Brahmins retorted by asking if he could keep the water drops in the air. Thomas said he would, provided that, if he did, they would accept his Lord as true God. This they promised never expecting the law of gravity to fail. But the Apostle threw up handfuls of water, which, to their amazement, remained in mid-air—glistening in the sun. Most of the Brahmins kept the promise and accepted the faith, while the rest cursed the place and left Palur."

It is further maintained "The higher castes among the Malabar Christians of today trace their descent from the Palur Brahmins, and among them four families claimed from the earliest times, the right of priesthood, like the Levites of Israel. The office of the highest dignitary—The *Arch deacon* was hereditary in the *Pakalamattam* family. He was the hierarchical head of the Kerala Church whenever the See was vacant, the Bishops coming usually from Persia or Chaldea."

So there was nothing unnatural that such a great soul, an ideal saint would attract a large number of crowd who would collect before him for spiritual pathfinding. His simple habits, his gentle demeanour, his austere way of living, his sacrifice for the poor, the great compassion for all and above all the very charm of his personality was respected by one and all. People who were curious for a God must have been attracted by the new God of this new *Sadhu*.

Although the saint visited a number of places in the country serving the diseased and healing them through his power of miracle, his main field of activities was the whole of *Chera*, modern Kerala. A large number of people embraced his faith "including near relatives of the Perumal (Raja).

Saint Thomas was a zealous devotee of the Lord and according to tradition sailed for China. As the records say "Eager to carry the word to all nations as his Master had commanded, the courageous Thomas is also said to have sailed to China, possibly in a Chinese trading junk." From China he returned to Malabar.

Like all Indian Saints devoted to God Almighty, Saint Thomas was a great disciplined organiser "He established the Church on a sound basis, crossed the *Ghats* and continued his preaching through the Kingdoms of *Pandyans* and the *Cholas*, winning over large numbers by his saintly life and the wonders he performed. The success of his mission was bound to rouse the hostility of the priests who having vainly tried to discredit him at last put him to death near a temple of *Kali* on the little mount near Mylapore, Madras, according to tradition, on 3rd July 72 AD, a man loved and revered by all, from the King to the Pariah.

"The tomb of St. Thomas had in the meanwhile become a centre of pilgrimage for Christians alike. Thus in the second decade of the sixteenth century, Durate Barboresa, who saw the tomb, crowded by pilgrims, wrote :

"He (the saint) lies very modestly in the church which his disciples built for him. The Muslims and Hindus used to burn lights on it, each one claiming it as his own. The

Church is arranged in our fashion with crosses on the altar and on the summit of the vault, and a wood engraving with peacocks as devices, but it is now very ruinous, and all around it covered with brushwood, and a poor Muslim holds charge of it and begs alms for it, for which a lamp is kept burning at night, and on what is left they live. Some Indian Christians go there on pilgrimage and carry away many relics, little earthen balls from the same tomb of the Blessed St. Thomas."

(Quoted in a *History Christianity in India
From Early Times to St. Francis Xavier
AD 52—1542*, page 48)

According to the Portuguese historian Gaspar Correa, "the Shrine was so greatly venerated that it was held in the highest esteem. For, on their festival days, the Hindus would bring their images accompanied by large crowds and great rejoicing, and would, as they approached the door of the church, lower them three times to the ground as a mark of reverence to it, a practice which had been followed from time immemorial."

(*Correa, Lendas da India*, page 724)

Pilgrims visiting Mylapore have left beautiful descriptions. "The local people called it Mylapore or Pavam, Mylapore meaning *the city of the peacock* from *Mayura*—changed into *Malia* by the Tamilians for reasons of metathesis, while *pavam* in their own parlance meant peacock."

Marco Polo mentions that the practice of taking a handful of mud from the grave was used as a potion against illness. Mylapore became a pilgrimage known throughout the world.

In 883 when the Anglo Saxon Chronicle was written, India was mentioned as a holy land by Christian world. It is mentioned there "Sighaln and Aethalstan conveyed to Rome the alms which King Alfred had vowed to send thither, and also to India, to St. Thomas and St. Bartholmew." Many gifts were sent by Alfred to St. Thomas in India by sea.

Saint Thomas is not spiritually dead. He lives among Millions of his followers in the world. He was a Godman. He lived and died for a faith that he bore so near to his heart.

Not only the Christians of the land, people of all faiths bow their heads almost every day at his Mount Tomb at Mylapore at Madras. When I visited the holy spot it was full of crowd, majority of whom were non-Christians.

People felt sad about the way the end of the Saint was hastened. Each sigh by a pilgrim touches the lamenting sky for the last nineteen hundred years. It is a protest against a mad man who tarnished the image of his own sect and land. That does not represent the voice of the land. St. Thomas is the only Apostle whose tomb, India is proud to preserve in the great holy land. He was an incarnation of love. India is proud of him. He belongs to India. He enriched the cultural heritage of India

The theory as advocated by some scholars that the modern European nations starting with the Portuguese have been responsible for introduction of Christianity into India is basically and factually wrong. This is in clear ignorance of the fact that the Malabar community now known as the Nestorians became Christians long before Christianity reached Europe : Portugal, England, France, Holland or Denmark. It must be specially noted that the European nations who came in the wake of Vasco da Gama came to trade and forced their merchandise on the nations around the Indian Ocean by their Superior arms. While these European nations were engaged in trade, the European Christian Missionaries were welcome at the court of Emperor Akbar. They enjoyed not only the freedom of preaching their *Gospels* but were invited to join the religious symposia at Fatehpur Sikri presenting comparative thoughts of Lord Christ. This comparative religious discourses held by Akbar was the first of its kind in the world.

The Malabar Church has been one of the oldest Christian institutions in India. "Among the visitors to the Malabar Church in the middle ages may be mentioned the names of Marcopolo, the Venetian traveller (1293), John of Monte Carvino, a Fransiscan friar (1292-93), Friar Jordan of Toulouse, a Dominican (1302) and John de Marignolli (1348) From all the evidences that are available we may infer that during this period, the Christians on the Malabar Coast established themselves as good traders as well as patriotic soldiers and

administrators. It may also be noted that Christians of Thomas was the name usually applied to these people who in more modern times are known as Syrian Christians, on account of their connection with the Syriac speaking churches in the East, and the use of Syriac as their ecclesiastical language”.

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV p. 550)

Some scholars are of the view that another Thomas, a Bishop from Edessa reached Malabar with a group of Christians from Iran during 345 AD.

“The first unquestionable proof of the presence of Christians in India comes from Cosmas indisopenstes who visited India about 535 AD and wrote an account of his travels. He found Christian communities in Malabar and at Kalyan near Bombay.” Certain type of cross, known as the *Thomas Cross* has been found both in Malabar and in Mylapur and the inscription in Persian shows that its date is at least as early as the seventh century. “In the eighth century King Alfred sent two priests with gifts to the Christians of India in honour of St. Thomas. In the thirteenth century, both Marco Polo and John of Monte Corvino visited South India and saw the Christian communities there.”

(*The Gazetteer of India*, Vol. I, p 488)

ST FRANCIS XAVIER

A very important landmark in the history of the Christian movement in India is the arrival of St. Francis Xavier. The Saint reached Goa in 1542. He was undoubtedly the most famous of all the missionaries, next perhaps only to the Apostle St. Thomas. He was a warm hearted true Christian whose heart used to bleed at the very sight of the poor.

Francis Xavier was born on April 7, 1506 at Navarre, Spain. In May 1533, he had his conversion. In March 1540 he was assigned a special Mission to visit the Indies. He sailed for Indies in April 1541, first reaching Mozambique and then setting out for Goa in the East.

In the early morning of Dec. 3, 1552 he breathed his last. The period 1542 to 1552 was a saga of his love for the poor and the down trodden. It also brought to the fore his missionary zeal and activity in full flow.

That God, which ever lives and loves,
 One God, one law, one element,
 And one far off divine event,
 To which the whole creation moves.

THREE MAIN COMMANDMENTS

To lead a life of happiness and peace the great Prophet has given three main recommendations that will lead mankind to perfection. This is the most significant message of the Prophet not only to his own disciples but to the whole of humankind. These are good thoughts (*humata*), good word (*hukhta*) and good deed (*huvarshtha*). The sermons are immortal message to the world. "No activity of man, whether in thought or word or deed should be such as would injure another being."

A good thought is the mainspring of human welfare. Everything centres round a good mind's functioning well. No spiritual pursuit is ever possible without a pure and serene thought. That is the first stage of a spiritual life. Even in thought a man commits so many sins. An evil thought is as bad as an evil action. So says the Prophet "the first thing needed is purity of thought, and as long as a man has not acquired that, he cannot advance a single step on the path of *asha*".

Secondly comes *Hukhta* or a good word. A scholar has aptly observed, "By *Hukhta* Zarathustra means exactly what Manu has said in a similar connection : Speak the truth but speak it pleasantly; do not speak an unpleasant truth but never utter a pleasant untruth." Historians will tell you how Parsis are adherent to truth. Even their enemies admit it.

Thirdly comes *Huvarshtha* means good deeds. The sacred *Ushtavaiti Gatha* sums up the whole message in the very opening sentence which says a universal truth : "Happiness comes to him, through whom happiness goes out to others". This is very much alike the main message of the *Karma Yoga*.

MAIN GUIDELINE TO LIFE

How to lead a pure life and get divine light ? This is explained in a very simple manner, specially for the benefit

of the lay men. According to the Prophet, a man must have full devotion to God. One must accept Him as the Father and Friend. It is very much similar to the lines of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* where God is described as the Father, Mother and the Friend. One must look upon the *Amesha Spentas* as great archangels. He looks upon *Angra-Mainyu* as some terrible demon who must be avoided for good. But as a great saintly scholar has observed, "There was something else in his great message which appealed directly to the average man. This was the teaching regarding the best use to be made of our lives in the world of men. It is this which has caused him to be remembered of human beings during all these centuries "

The Prophet laid greatest stress on attainment through service to humanity. Even now the Parsis are religiously true to the teachings of Zarathushtra and as observed in the *Cultural History of India*, "their position in India today is the direct result of the life of service they are trying to lead."

There is not the slightest doubt that the Prophet was a great saviour of mankind and by spreading his divine message and practising them in daily life the Parsis have definitely become a part of Cultural mainstream of the land but they have played a notable role that is most unique and memorable.

Professor Toynbee observed, "In Iran Zarathustra's militant monotheism had misfired. His revolutionary religion had been captured by the hereditary Iranian priesthood, the *Magi*, as in India the devotional worships of *Vishnu* and *Shiva* were captured by the Brahmins. In Iran after Zarathustra's death as in Pharaonic Egypt after Akhenation's death, polytheism revived in response to a continuing hunger for it. *Ahura Mazda's* spiritual attributes became so many goddesses in their own right. Moreover, *Anahita*, a cherished pre-Zoroastrian water goddess, succeeded in reinstating herself. These were steps towards the transformation of Zoroastrianism into an emotional religion; but these first steps were not followed up, an even adulterated Zoroastrianism of the *Magi* never fully won the Iranian's hearts."

(Toynbee, Arnold : *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 294)

Gradually Zoroastrianism started attributing to various aspects of *Ahura Mazda*.

"There was no attempt on the part of Zoroastrian Iranians themselves abandoned any struggle to preserve their political independence when they were the Persian Empire's imperial people and Zoroastrianism was their national religion.

(*Ibid.*, p. 371)

When the East Roman Empire got rejuvenated (628-726) after the Muslim Arabs challenged the East Roman Empire the Arabs' subjects Zoroastrians were readier and quicker to accept Islam than their subject Christians of any denomination. In Iran the Zoroastrian community was eventually reduced to a small minority confined to a few secluded enclaves. Zoroastrianism was kept alive by diaspora of refugees to western India.

Of course, before this as Toynbee noted, "Zoroastrianism had gained a foothold in China" too. That was near about 525 AD.

INHERITANCE OF ALL HUMANITY

Millions of people drew their spiritual inspiration from this great religious faith. To quote an authority, "During its triumphant career of over two millennia it came into living contact with millions of people both to the east and west of Iran and in this period it transferred a good deal of its moral and spiritual vigour to other people. The Hebrews and the Christians and the Muslims have all drunk deep, consciously or unconsciously at the founts of Zoroastrianism, and the best of Zoroastrianism lives in the best of other religions. It is perhaps this consciousness that made the conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islam so easy after the Muslim conquest of Persia, and more definitely took away the zeal to spread their faith among others. A flame that has passed on its light to countless other flames must disclaim so sordid a feeling as jealousy. Good thoughts, good words and good deeds are not the monopoly of the Zoroastrianism. In the dim antiquity Zoroaster preached it, and his reward is that it has become the common inheritance of all humanity."

(Wadia, A.R. : *Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*)

THE MAIN MANTRA

The greatest Truth, secret to God-realisation is contained in the main *mantra* which reflects the very core and essence of Zarathushtra's philosophy. "Leaving aside the deeper spiritual implications, even from the ordinary point of view, this *mantra* teaches us some of the eternal verities and from this one can easily understand why the Parsis have still clung to their ancient faith. Says the *mantra* :

"Just as an *ahu* (a king) (is) all powerful (upon earth), so also (is) a *ratu* (a rishi), (all powerful everywhere) by reason of *Asha* ; The gifts of *Vohu-Mano* are for (those who are) working for the Lord of life ;

And the Khshathra of *Ahura* (is bestowed) upon him who constitutes himself the helper of the meek or lowly."

SIMILARITIES WITH ARYAN CULTURE

There are many similarities and dissimilarities between the faiths of the Aryans and the Zoroastrians. "Vedic Hinduism and Zoroastrianism bear the same relationship as Judaism to Christianity. It is an accepted fact that the Aryans were not indigenous to India, but had invaded India in the hoary past. The reason for this invasion may have been economic, for the fertile plains of India have always attracted foreign conquering hordes. But it is equally likely that there had been some sort of religious schism between the Iranian Aryans of Central Asia and the Aryans who settled down in India."

The greatest common factors between the two are the two all important main religious books. For the Aryans the main objects of worship are *Indra*, *Mitra* and *Agni* (Fire). Strangely to the Zoroastrians too they are the very same. The sacred expressions both in the *Vedas* and the *Avesta* are very much similar. For instance in the *Veda Soma* (a drink which intoxicates) is the same thing as *Haoma*. The very word *Veda* means knowledge; in the *Avesta*, *A-vista* too means the same thing. A very important feature of the Vedic rituals is *Yajna* which means sacrifice to the God of Fire. In the *Avesta*, *Yasna* the most important aspect of the Zoroastrians religion is prayer. *Ga* which is the synonym for hymn for the Hindus, for the Parsis it is *Gatha* which means divine music.

But there are basic differences too. To the Hindu *Devas* mean divine spirit as opposed to the *Asuras* who were symbols of demons. In the *Avesta*, *Daeva* means the Demons and *Ahura* means the Almighty God. The *Vedas* do not recommend idolatry, similarly the *Avesta* does not support idolatry.

It is indeed a special characteristic, as remarked by Dr. Markham that "Persia is the only one nation that has never in any period of history worshipped graven images of any kind."

The concept of Nature worship, a common feature between the two nations had been seen even before the introduction of Zoroastrianism. The Persians, like Indians were worshippers of Fire, Water and Earth, exactly the same as described in ancient Indian scriptures. Scholars even go to the extent of observing that "the religion of the *Vedas* was also the religion of the ancient Iranians."

The introduction of the new faith however "marked a departure from the old Nature worship of Vedic religion." In his *Gathas*, the Prophet "uses terms of reverence for the elements of nature but does not advocate any direct worship of them." He looks to them only as "symbols" of the might and glory of *Ahura Mazda*, definitely a more scientific approach. As usual the priestly class insisted on the worshipping of the water Goddess and "in the old traditions of Nature worship."

Very much like the Hindu system of caste classification (which were four in number) the ancient Zoroastrians had three castes : *Arthavans*, *Rathaesh tars* and *Vastryosh*. Even today the Parsis in India have two castes : the priestly class and the laity who are known as *beh dins*. In ancient Persia, the caste system among the Zoroastrians was quite rigid. "The priests used to be very exclusive and intermarriage was seldom permitted." This distinction, however has vanished with the modernity in outlook but about priesthood is still persists. It is almost hereditary and as by tradition only a priest's son can take over the job of conducting a prayer.

The Hindus had four *Vedas*, the Zoroastrians had five *Gathas*. They were *Ahunavaiti*, *Ushtavaiti*, *Spenta Mainyu*,

Volu-khshatra and *Vahishta-Ishti*. Whereas the first four are mainly philosophical and ethical in their themes, the last one is, "hymn on the occasion of a daughter's marriage." The *Gathas*, by and large deal "with the problem of evil as due to the activities of *Angra Mainyu*" by prayer to the omnipotent *Ahura Mazda*.

PARSIS COME TO INDIA

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India was equally eminent as a scholar and author. In his famous *Discovery of India*, Panditji wrote, "India is mentioned in the *Avesta* and there is also some kind of a description of north India in it. In the *Rig Veda* there are references to Persia—the Persians were called *Parshavas* and later *Parasika*, from which the modern word Parsi is derived."

(Nehru, Jawaharlal : *Discovery of India*, p. 151)

Panditji also recalled in the same book how thirteen hundred years ago this sacred religion came to India and was most welcome as also the Jews. "Thirteen hundred years ago when Islam came to Iran, some hundreds or thousands of the followers of the old Zoroastrian faith migrated to India. They found a welcome here and settled down on the western coast following their faith and custom without being interfered with and without interfering with others." The Parsis are well known for their demeanour, refined cultural background and hard work. They are a peace loving lot. Jawaharlal recorded their beautiful assimilation with cultural life in India. Wrote Nehru, "It is remarkable how the Parsis, as they have been called, have quietly and unostentatiously fitted into India, made it their home and yet kept quite apart as a small community, tenaciously holding on to their old customs. Inter-marriage outside the fold of the community was not allowed and there have been very few instances of it. This in itself did not occasion any surprise in India, as it was usual here for people to marry within their own caste. Their growth in numbers has been very slow and even now their total number is about one hundred thousand. They have prospered in business and many of them are the leaders of industry in India. They have had practically no

contacts with Iran and are completely Indians and yet they hold on to their traditions and the memories of their ancient homeland."

(*Ibid.* pp. 153-54)

Professor Basham wrote, "the Parsi, fugitives who were expelled from Persia by Muslim invaders found a welcome shelter in India."

(Basham A.L. : *A Cultural History of India*, p. 62)

In the National Anthem by Tagore Parsis are described as *Parasikas*. The late Prime Minister who herself was married to Feroze Gandhi a member of the Parsi community happily observed "two communities—the Parsis and the Jews (in India) are numerically small, but culturally dynamic."

(Gandhi Indira : *The Years of Endeavour*, p. 4)

The total number of Zoroastrians in the whole world today, "with the exception of some ten thousand in Iran all of them live in India, the vast majority being concentrated in the city of Bombay." Jawaharlalji, however noted differently. "The Parsis who originally settled in Gujarat thirteen hundred years ago, may be considered as Gujaratis; their language has long been Gujarati."

(Nehru, Jawaharlal : *Discovery of India*, p. 351)

The Parsis have their own temples of Fire. There are three varieties of Parsi Temples—*Atash Behrams*, *Agiaris* and *Dadgahs*. There are only eight *Atash Behrams*; one in Udvarda, one in Navsari, two in Surat and four in Bombay city. The oldest of them is *Iran Shah* in Udvarda. Most interestingly, the sacred Fire in this holy Temple "has been kept blazing for 1000 years and is unique in that respect. This Fire Temple is a place of pilgrimage for the Parsis. Once the sacred Fire is installed in a Fire Temple, it must always be kept alive."

Fire is the most sacred object of worship for the Parsis just like the Hindus. No sacred occasion or *Puja* is complete without *Havan*, worship of Fire. Similar is the place of Fire with the Parsis.

PRAYERS AND HOLY SCRIPTURES

It must be noted that "The daily prayers of the Parsis even today exalt Fire, Water, Earth, Sun and Moon but beyond this exaltation there is the recognition of *Ahura Mazda* as the only God, and thus even post-Zoroastrianism bears the impress of Zoroaster. During the decadence of Zoroastrianism, books like the *Vendidad* became popular and are considered sacred even today."

Vendidad carries the main message of the holy Prophet, Polygamy was allowed. It says, "Verily I say it unto thee, O Spitama Zarathustra, the man who has a wife is far above him who lives in continence ; he who keeps a house is far above him who has none ; he who has children is far above the childless man ; he who has riches is far above him who has none."

It must also be known that in Zoroastrian religion there is no place for any fasts. Liquor was introduced later on, as is practised in *Shakti Puja* (Durga or Kali) where *Karan Bari* is offered to the Goddess. An authority on the philosophy very pertinently noted, "the essence of its ethics can be well summarised in three words : *Humata* (good thoughts), *Hukhta* (good words), and *Huvarshata* (good deeds)." *Dinkart*, a sacred book of the Zoroastrians points out, "when men love and help one another to the best of their power, they get the greatest pleasure." It pleaded philanthropy and charity as a must for the Parsis.

As Dante's *Divine Comedia*, the great Epic to the Parsis, *Ardaviraf Nameh* describes the heaven and the hell. It insists "There is only one path and it's the path of Righteousness." Like the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, the greatest stress in it is laid on purity of mind.

According to the holy scripture *Vendidad*, "Purity is for men, next to life, the greatest good ; that purity O Zarathushtra, that is in the religion of *Mazda* for him who cleanses his own self with good actions, words and thoughts."

The *Gathas*, like the *Tirukkural*, lays greatest stress on the profession of agriculture. Domestic animals have to be taken

care of. As the Hindus consider the cow a sacred animal so also exactly in the *Behram Yesht* which clearly says, "strength to the cow, benedictions to the cow, sweet words for the cow, covering for the cow."

The sacred thread ceremony is an important feature of the Parsi community.

The dead body is placed in the *Dokhmas*, Towers of Silence. The bodies are left there naked and vultures are fed. The reason is simple. Fire is sacred. So is a dead body. Previously, in ancient days the dead bodies used to be thrown on the mountain tops. Electric cremation is however, replacing the old tradition.

There are restricted number of Parsi festivals. Twenty first of March is celebrated as the New Year for the Zoroastrians. That Sixth day of the first month is known as *Khorad Sal*. That is the auspicious birthday of the Prophet Zoroaster. The eleventh day of the tenth month is his death anniversary. *Jamshedi Naoroz* which is the New Year day for them is the auspicious birthday of the Prophet. That is more sacred than any other day or festival. The nineteenth day of the Zoroastrian month *Farvadin* is like *Mahalaya* of the Hindus when memorial service is conducted by the Parsis at the *Tower of Silence*. Just like the *Pitri Tarpan*, the Memorial Service starts ten days earlier and finally ends on the *Farvadin*.

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16

India in the Eyes of Foreign Travellers

It is not adventurers and plunderers only who were lured by the vast wealth of India—her gold, pearls, jewels and precious stones, India also attracted a large number of pilgrims, travellers and tourists—in ancient times, as even today,—in search of Truth, knowledge and to assuage their thirst for eternal peace.

Because of the multi-religious nature, she attracted pilgrims of different faiths from different countries. For instance the Buddhists come to visit the holy birth place of Buddha at Lumbini, the sacred spot of enlightenment at Sarnath and the place of his last journey Kusinagar. They also came to visit important Buddhist monasteries, which are innumerable.

The Christians visit India specially to pay homage to the great Saint Thomas, one of the direct disciples of Lord Christ whose tomb is enshrined in the Cathedral at Mylapore, Madras. They also visit in thousands the famous Church of St. Francis Xavier at Goa. They have been visiting these sacred places for centuries. Many of them left detailed accounts of their journey to India. Marco Polo was one the outstanding travellers to leave an account of the influence of St. Thomas.

Many travellers came and left permanent records of India's socio-economic conditions, cultural achievements and specially the high tradition of Indian educational system.

Fa-Hien, Huen Tsang, Megasthenes, Ibn Batuta, Alberuni, I-tsing are some of the notables to mention.

Many came to India to study the Indian philosophy, art and culture, musicology and the discipline of leading a life of renunciation.

India had a very highly systematic method of education. Nalanda was one of the top most universities in the world imparting education, especially on Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist literature.

MEGASTHENES (4th Century B.C.)

Among the foreign visitors who left detailed accounts of contemporary India, the bulk of them were from the neighbouring country China with equal zeal for knowledge of the teachings of the Mahamati Buddha. There are evidences of exchange of scholars and pilgrims as a feature of the cultural intercourse between these two great ancient lands China and India.

They, however, were not much interested in politics or socio-economic problems as they were keen to explore the secret of Truth. These books, one must remember, should be treated more as travelogue rather than historical accounts.

The Greek envoy Megasthenes came to India more or less on a diplomatic assignment. He had a flair for writing and the account he has left of contemporary India is a mine of information relating to the Maurya period. He came to India during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. He was the Greek ambassador to India.

Obviously, being an administrator, his emphasis in his account was on statecraft, town planning, administration, description of division of administrative set up, diplomacy, even espionage "where prostitutes were used to collect secret informations." He touched in detail about the tax structure-land revenue system not forgetting to mention their rates

including the rates of Sales Tax. Megasthenes hardly gave any details of Indian philosophy or the scriptures. He was a practical diplomat. His treatises on India however were the first hand account by a man on socio-economic lives of the people during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya. He repeatedly described about the richness of the people, the luxurious way of royal life, absence of any famine or slavery. Man was free to choose his profession. Megasthenes was sent to India by Seleucus.

Prof. A. L. Basham noted that the envoy (Megasthenes) wrote a detailed account of India which became the standard text book on the subject for later classical writers. Unfortunately, no manuscript of Megasthenes' description of India survived, but many Greek and Latin authors made copious use of it, so that from their works his account could be partially reconstructed. The record of Megasthenes though by no means as complete and accurate as one might have wished, has been of great importance as it was the first authentic and connected description of India by a foreign traveller. It would be evident from a comparison of the fragments of Megasthenes with the *Arthashastra* that the Mauryan empire had developed a highly organised bureaucratic administration which controlled the whole economic life of the State, and that it had a very thorough secret service system which was active among all classes from the highest ministers to the submerged tenth of the towns."

(Basham A.L. : *The Wonder that was India*)

Megasthenes had great admiration for Emperor Chandragupta Maurya for his energetic administration of justice, which he presided over personally in open darbar. He dwelt in great luxury in an enormous palace at Pataliputra, which though built wholly of wood, was "of unbelievable beauty and splendour". The envoy narrated the life of the emperor as not a happy one, since he was "in constant fear of assassination, and ever present danger from many Indian Kings, and very stringent precautions were taken for his security."

That was obvious. Chandragupta Maurya had worked his way to the throne by defeating the Nandas.

One could get an extremely fascinating description of the capital from the eye witness account of Megasthenes. It seemed the foreign dignitary was simply charmed by the "unbelievable beauty and splendour," of the town planning specially the engineering design and architecture novelty of the Emperor's palace. It was a huge city described by Megasthenes as "very fine." There were wooden walls all around it. This was "controlled by an administrative board of thirty members, who regulated in detail the whole social and economic life of the people" Megasthenes noted also the prevailing caste system. But he did not talk of the prevailing system of four castes. He classified them into seven "endogamous group", which, Prof. Basham considered as "erroneous."

Out of the seven classes as recorded by Megasthenes, two have been described as connected with the Government, the last of the seven "those who deliberate on public affairs" must represent the councillors while the penultimate class of overseers are the *adhyakshas* or superintendents of the *Arthasastra*.

There were city councils. Megasthenes observed that a Committee of thirty members divided into six sub-committees managed the administration of Pataliputra. Later historians however expressed their doubts about its authenticity. We must not forget that Megasthenes was not a historian. He wrote whatever he saw or perhaps noted whatever he surmised as if it was recorded as in a personal diary.

Strangers' movements were duly recorded in a register though *Arthasastra* by Kautilya did not observe its strict adherence but Megasthenes "confirms that registers were maintained and the movements of strangers carefully supervised." There was a regularly strict secret service.

About taxation Megasthenes mentioned unlike *Smriti* (which says one sixth) it was fixed on one fourth of the yield. This also confirmed Kautilya's *Arthasastra*. Megasthenes clearly mentioned about ten cent levy of Sales Tax which has not been confirmed by any contemporary writer. *Arthasastra* mentioned only sales tax of only one twentieth of

their value ; that too only on few items like grains, oil, sugar, pots and cheap textiles.

In spite of a battle or war, the farmers used to be busy in tilling their fields "peacefully," recorded the Greek envoy.

Megasthenes' view of the committee of thirty divided into six sub-committees which controlled the corps of infantry, cavalry, chariots, elephants, navy and commissariat, although not confirmed by *Arthashastra* or any other literature of the period sound to be reasonable. Being a Greek diplomat he must have taken special note of this aspect. The envoy's description of the great wooden wall surrounding the whole city with 570 towns and 64 gates too seem to be reasonable. His classification of division of labour was perhaps not based on the age old caste system. He described it in seven clear cut categories based upon his own observation. He "noted seven endogamous and craft-exclusive classes in India—philosophers, peasants, herdsmen, craftsmen and traders, soldiers government officials and councillors. It would be wrong to say that "his sevenfold division is certainly false." Megasthenes did not follow the caste-wise division of the people and perhaps he did it most justifiably. In his remarks, Prof. Basham seems to be unkind to a diplomat who knew more of state-craft and administration rather than sociology. Megasthenes's observation that there was no slave system must be taken also to be a correct version. In private lives and system of society a sad slavery system was perhaps prevalent then. In fact when he recorded it he did it with great joy and out of his great reverence for India, a country he began to love from the core of his heart.

Prostitutes were used even for espionage. Megasthenes noted "the spies did much of their work with the help of prostitutes."

Megasthenes wrote clearly that "famine was unknown in India." Megasthenes left India at the end of the reign of Chandra Gupta Maurya. But he left a permanent account, an on the spot study of India. He was even greatly fascinated not by the land and the people, the flora and fauna of the

vast country. It seems he had grown a special liking for Pataliputra which, according to him, was "a long narrow city stretching nine miles along the bank of the Ganga and reaching only one and a half miles inland. He clearly described that "the palace of Chandragupta Maurya though very large and luxurious, was built of carved and gilded wood, and the earliest stone buildings to have survived. Megasthenes wrote, "At the junction of this river (Ganges) with another is situated Pataliputra a city of eighty stadia (9.2 miles) in length and fifteen stadia (1.7 miles) in breadth. It is of a parallelogram and is girded with a wooden wall, pierced with loopholes for the discharge of arrows. It has a ditch in front for defence and for receiving the sewage of the city. This ditch, which encompassed it all round, is 600 feet in breadth and thirty cubits in depth, and the wall is crowned with 570 towers and has four and sixty gates."

THE CHINESE PILGRIMS

The *Light of Asia* attracted the largest number of scholars and pilgrims to India. There was a constant stream of learned Buddhist scholars going abroad from India and coming to India. This stream continued for centuries. Jawahar Lal Nehru in his masterly *Discovery of India* has observed, "When the Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien came to India in the fifth century A. D. a thousand years after Buddha he saw that Buddhism was flourishing in its parent country. In the Seventh century A. C. the still more famous pilgrim Hien Tsang came to India and witnessed signs of decay, although even then it was strong in some areas. Quite a large number of Buddhist scholars and monks gradually drifted from India to China."

(Nehru, Jawaharlal : *Discovery of India*)

THE CHINESE ACCOUNTS

A large number of travellers who visited India have left their accounts of contemporary India. Their deep appreciation for Indian culture has been reflected in all the records they have gathered. Some of them even became regular students of Indian universities to study the secrets of the lofty philosophical thoughts. They came from China, Greece, the

Middle East, the citadels of ancient civilisations of the world. Some came as mere pilgrims.

“The Chinese pilgrim, Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-tsing have left records of their travels in India which throw a flood light of information on Indian history and life.”

Hiuen Tsang had a special fascination for Indian culture. At that time the University of Nalanda had earned the status that Tagore's Visva-Bharati enjoys today. Students used to flock to this great centre of learning from far and near specially to study the Buddhist scriptures. As Tagore was the attraction of the *Ashram* at Santiniketan, the most learned scholar Sheel Bhadra was the main attraction for the students of Buddhist literature. It was recorded how Hiuen Tsang “studied the Indian ruler of the time, Emperor Harsha.” He was in India in the middle of the seventh century. It would be interesting to recall the Japanese scholar Prince's efforts to preach Buddhism in Japan contemporaneously. Of course the most outstanding among the Chinese travellers was Hiuen Tsang who was by far the most knowledgeable, deeper in his vision of Indian way of life, specially the spiritual life. His main attention was the Buddha—his teachings, the holy places associated with the Enlightened One. His love for India, the land and the people was mainly due to their association with Buddha. From the point of view of leaving eye witness accounts too Hiuen Tsang topped. His accounts were thorough, and observations keen, and he looked to an event with a feeling of deep sympathy. When ever one reads the accounts of Hiuen Tsang, one could feel how he identified himself with the Indian philosophy, Indian culture and the Indian way of life. He was definitely not happy to witness that “Buddhism was losing its hold on the people”. Equally important and interesting were the accounts on India left by Itsing (671-695 AD) Huei Chao (725-729 AD) and on—King (751-790 AD).

FA HIEN

The eminent Buddhist traveller Fa Hien visited India during the reign of Chandra Gupta II. We are told “the

It was on March 12, 1622 that Francis Xavier was canonised as a Saint. The canonisation was based on a number of miracles worked out by the Saint in life and after death as transpired in the testimonials of hundreds of witnesses of his wonderful life and deeds. It also made it clear that he practised Christian virtues to a heroic degree and that from the moment of his conversion in 1533 till his untimely death on the desolate island of Sancian off the coast of China, St. Xavier had but one aim in life—"to love God with all his mind, heart and strength, and spend himself in His service for the eternal salvation of men in all kinds of labours, trials, sufferings and humiliation." With his canonisation and conferment of the sainthood on him, his name has been included in Liturgical Honours. He was named the Chief Patron and Protector of the Indies, Defender of the East, Patron of all Missions, Patron of Institutes and came to occupy a prominent place in the Pantheon of the Roman Martyrology. The simplicity, nobility and the humility of the great saint is firmly etched in the following simple prayer, which he invoked to God :

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

Where there is injury, ...pardon.

Where there is discord, ...unity.

Where there is doubt, ...faith.

Where there is error, ...truth.

Where there is despair, ...hope.

Where there is sadness, ...joy.

Where there is darkness, ...light.

O Divine Master,

grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For

it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

The Christians have played a very important role in enriching the cultural heritage of India. In the field of spreading of education their role had been unique indeed. It has been truly observed in the *Cultural Heritage of India* (Vol. IV) that "In promoting literacy, in raising the status of women and in encouraging cottage industries, western missions, such as the Carmelites, the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission, have rendered magnificent service to the people of Malabar without distinction of caste or creed. Members of the Church in Malabar have contributed much to the development of Malayalam literature, the promotion of primary, secondary, and collegiate education, the adaptation of Christianity to Indian conditions and the rapprochement between different communities in the field of political and philanthropic activities."

George Mathan, K. I. Verghese Mapillay, C. Ananthapai and K. V. Simon are some of the famous names whose contribution in flourishing the Malayalam literature will be recorded ever. Similarly Carey and Marshman will be remembered in the history of Bengali literature for the spade work in prose works and grammar in Bengal.

It is true that the European traders came to India mainly for commercial gain in pepper, spices, silk and peacocks but after some of them set up colonial rule in Bengal, they got equally interested in promoting cultural activities.

In the South, some of them penetrated into Cochin, Tuticorin, Malabar and enlightened the fisherfolk who so long had never drawn any attention from their community for cultural or religious developments.

Here again we must recall the extraordinary role of Francis Xavier (1506-52). He was popularly known as "the apostle of the Indies." He was the first among the Jesuit Missionary to arrive in India has "rightly become celebrated as one of the greatest in the whole history of the Church". Another great name is that of the dedicated Christian

Missionary, Robert de Nobili (1577-1656). He was an Italian nobleman. He spread the gospel of the Christ among the *elite*. He would dress himself as an Indian monk thereby "attracted many by his habits and ideals as well as by his erudition."

A very important factor in the spread of mass education in the country has been the introduction of the Print Medium. Printing Machine, in fact revolutioned the cultural life in a new fashion. The first printing press, it must be recorded with gratitude, were brought to India by Jesuits about 1550, and the Spanish lay-brother John Gonsalves was the first to cast types with which a catechism in Malayalam was printed in 1577. The Catholic Mission organised primary education as well as higher education through the Jesuit Missionaries. The Roman Catholics, however, played an equally important role specially in the important towns in South India. It is quite correctly observed that "Christianity has found a true home in the South and has now become a member of the family of religions in India. In so far as Christians are true to the life and spirit of their Master, Jesus Christ, they will be able to serve the best interests of the land they belong to, as well as of the world at large."

Similarly in the north, specially in Bengal, William Carey played a unique role in the spread of Christianity, and what is more important, education among the intelligentsia. He reached India in 1793 and became more or less a part of the soil by completely identifying himself with the local people. About, William Carey, it has been observed by historians that he became a legendary figure in the cultural life in northern India. It has been recorded, "arrival of William Carey in 1793 opens a new chapter in the history of Christianity in India. With him begins, according Dr. Latourette, 'a new era in Protestant Missions not only in India but also in the whole world'. William Carey was the first missionary to be sent out by a missionary society from the west. "Carey has a secure place in history as the father of the modern missionary enterprise." He is known specially for his pioneering work in the field of Bengali translation of the Holy Bible.

He is still remembered for his selfless service in the field of primary education and journalism, specially in Bengal. As early as in 1818 Carey set up the Serampore College, one of the earliest in the whole country and made it a great centre of learning by dint of his single hearted devotion. It was started, to quote his original ideal, to promoting "piety and learning". It was one of the earliest institutions of higher education in the whole of India.

In Bengal who does not know the role of Henry Vivian Derozio who as the spiritual and academic *guru* of *Young Bengal* brought about a new turn in the cultural renaissance of India. A Christian apart, he was one of the most learned men of Calcutta of his time and accepted India as his own. His influence on the cultured *elite* of the middle class almost set fire to the entire old thoughts of begottery, idolatory and superstitions. Many brilliant youths like Poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt embraced Christianity under his magnetic influence.

Some of the great educational institutions in India run by Christians that played important role in shaping the career of millions of students during the last century or more are Madras Christian College, Wilson College (Bombay), St. Xavier College (Calcutta), St. John's College (Agra), Ewing Christian College (Allahabad), American College, (Madras), and St. Stephen's College, (Delhi).

A very important aspect of the spread of educational programme of the Christian Missionaries which helped a large number, so long neglected people, had been their work among the tribal people. "Among the most successful types of work undertaken by the missions is that among tribal people and Harijans. The several tribal areas missionaries have reduced the spoken language to writing, introduced schools, hospitals and social welfare schemes and have thus effected a change for the better in the mode of life of these people. This is true of people like the Garos, the Khasis and the Lusheis in Assam, the Oraons and Mundas in Chota Nagpur, the Santhals in Bihar and the Khardis, in Orissa. The work among the Harijans has been most marked in the Bhil country in Western

India, in certain parts of the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and East Bengal.”

The Christian education moulded many brilliant characters who played their important roles in building a new India. To quote Nehru, “English education brought a widening of Indian horizons, an admiration for English literature and institutions a revolt against some customs and aspects of Indian life and a growing demand for political life.”

(Nehru : *The Discovery of India*, p. 337)

Nehru further observed “The desire of the Christian missionaries to translate the Bible into every possible language thus resulted the development of many Indian languages.”

There is not the slightest doubt that Christianity played a unique role in changing the face of new India. Almost all great patriots, who sacrificed their lives and gave a clarion call to fight the alien rulers had their initiation of knowledge in English medium schools and colleges mostly run by Christian missionaries. The first President of the Indian National Congress was a Christian. Their role in the great freedom movement too has been exemplary. Charlie Andrews (C.F. Andrews), Annie Besant and scores of others belonging to the Christian community dreamt of and worked for a free India. They had identified themselves as part and parcel of the mainstream, of the lofty Indian culture and civilisation. Many great Saints like Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo, Kesab Sen had expressed their highest appreciation of the lofty thoughts of Lord Christ. They drew from Him great inspiration.

The influence of Christianity on Hinduism certainly cannot be minimised. To quote a great scholar of international repute, “it seems highly probable, when we consider the region in which the revival of *Bhakti* in the time of Ramanuja took place, and its nearness to the Nestorian Christians of South India, that he had some acquaintance with the Christian truth.” Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar has probably been on surer grounds when he suggested that, “some of the finer points in the theory of *prapatti* may be traced to the influence of Christianity.”

This seem to be in agreement with our view that the whole intensification of the spirit of *Bhakti* of which the doctrine of *Prapatti* is an instance, may be due to Christianity making itself felt in the South.

Today, Christianity is a living and active faith representing the third biggest community in the country. Every Christian should be proud of the lofty heritage of the civilisation and the culture of his motherland of which he/she is a constituent unit.

In India, Christian movement is as popular, equally as perhaps in any Christian country. May be more because in India the stress is on prayer than any thing else. The supremacy of Indians over all other nations in the realm of religion is its power of assimilation. India welcomes the best of every religion. In fact, it may sound paradoxical but truly there is a belief among the *Vaishnavities* that Lord Christ was an incarnation of *Narayana*. No less an authentic source than the *Cultural Heritage of India* mentions : "According to some scholars, the *Narayaniya* section of the *Mahabharata* suggests a journey really undertaken by some Indian *Vaishnavas* to the Christian countries and points to an attempt, in the typical Indian eclectic fashion, to include Christ among the incarnation of the supreme spirit *Narayana*. Others however, take the story to be a mere flight of imagination."

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p. 201)

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15

Zoroastrianism

Indian culture is proud to have the cream of thought of greatest number of world Prophets who dedicated their lives in search of peace, justice for humankind and a clean living. One such great Prophet was Zarathustra or Zoroaster who founded a new religion on his enlightened knowledge. He was born in Medea in 660 BC which is today known as Iran. He was convinced that "life was a struggle between the forces of good and evil. The spirit of good was *Ahura Mazda* with its helper *Mithras*, the Light. The evil spirit was *Angra Mainyu* or Ahriman, the Lie Demon. Man could not be neutral in the struggle. He had to fight for right and live a righteous life. Those who lived righteousness went to paradise which was a state of immortal holiness in thought, word and deed. The impious were condemned to an eternal hell of evil thoughts and deeds and physical torment." By 500 BC Zoroastrianism spread throughout Persia and Iran. It became the most leading faith.

The immortal messages uttered by the Holy Prophet *Zarathustra* were collected, edited and a sacred book was published. This is the holiest book called *Avesta* or *Zend Avesta* which at once became the Bible of the Persians.

During the eight century a large number of Zoroastrians fled to India and got settled there. The Indian culture and

tradition proudly accepted them all. These Zoroastrians are the ancestors of the modern Parsi community in India. Today they form part and parcel of Indian culture. Although their total number is only one million, these Parsis "represent the flower of the present day Zoroastrian community."

The main centre of the Parsi community is at Bombay where three fourths of their total strength have settled permanently.

They are very hard working, extremely cultured, well informed, financially strong with specialised skill for business. They form an important part of the Indian culture. There is no national cultural function where religious scripts are recited, where the holy *Zend Avesta* is not respectfully recited along with other religious scriptures.

Zend Avesta described the conflict between *Ormuzd* or *Ahura Mazda*, God of Light and good and *Ahriman*, spirit of darkness and evil. *Zoroaster* became known in its modern form because the Greeks pronounced *Zarathustra* that way. So say it is an *apabramsa* form from *Zarathustra* (or new Persian *Zardushi*) to the corrupt Greek form *Zoroaster* which became the popular name of the Prophet.

This new faith, which once spread like wild fire and inspired millions was considered a full fledged major religion by a number of countries. It is interesting to note that the Prophet's versions of enlightened knowledge as reflected in the holy *Zend Avesta* sound very much like the hymns uttered by the Indian sages, possibly during the same time.

It can be said with authority that "Zoroaster taught a new religion rooted in the old Iraniyan—or Aryan-folk religion, of which we can form some representation by comparison with the religion of the *Veda*. The Aryan folk religion was polytheistic. Worship was paid to popular divinities, such as the war-god and dragon-slayer *Indra*, to natural forces and elements such as fire, but the Aryans also believed in the ruling of moral powers and of an eternal law in nature. On solemn occasions the inspiring drink soma (*haoma*) was consumed by the devout. Numerous coincidences with the Indian

religion survives in Zoroastrianism, side by side with astonishing diversities.”

According to Professor Arnold Toynbee, “Zarathustra had rejected the traditional religion of the Iranian speaking peoples and had replaced it by a new one. Zarathustra believed that he had been commissioned to propagate this faith by the one good God, Ahura Mazda, to whom he had given his undivided allegiance.”

(Toynbee, Arnold : *Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 184)

Toynbee noted : Zarathustra “degraded” all the gods of the traditional Iranian Pantheon excepting “the great spirit” Ahura Mazda—to the status of devils !

Very much like Goddess Ganga in India, in Iran *Anahita*, the water Goddess used to be worshipped before introduction of Zarathustra’s God of Light. According to the Zoroastrian doctrine “the current war between light and darkness (between good and evil) is temporary, and is going to end in the permanent victory of the good God *Ahura Mazda* over his evil adversary *Angra Mainyush*.”

Toynbee felt that Zarathustra’s light and darkness were “mental images, standing respectively for good and evil.”

The Zoroastrians were happy among themselves. They had no ambition to make it a world religion. There were many royal patrons in the land of its origin but it never stretched or extended outside aggressively. Where as Christianity penetrated into the Persian Empire there was no such move to preach Zoroastrianism outside. Toynbee narrates how, “The Zoroastrian Church made no converts in the Roman Empire and no voluntary converts in Armenia. Unlike the Christian and Manichaean Church, the Zoroastrian Church did not seek to convert all mankind.”

Comparing the two important empires—the Roman and the Persian—Toynbee noted that it was only during Kartins (a militant Zoroastrian ecclesiastic) when the militant ecclesiastic insisted on not only making Zoroastrianism the established religion of the Persian Empire, but the exclusive religion of at least the Iranian provinces. This Kartin was a

priest by profession and according to Toynbee, "Kartin, the Zoroastrian ecclesiastic, had risen to the summit of the hierarchy in the reign (A. D. 277-93) of Shahpura I's third successor, Vahram II. Kartin was now made priest of the Sasamids ancestral temple of *Anahita* at Stakr and also of the *Fire Altar* there." This individual rose to be even adviser to Vahram I (who ruled during A.D. 274-7). Gradually the Zoroastrian Church became more and more powerful, particularly during the Sasanian Persian Empire. It became as powerful as the Christian Church was in Constantinian and Theodosian Roman Empire.

The *Cultural Heritage of India* describes the Prophet as *Maharsi Zarathustra* because throughout the world the Zoroastrians prefix the epithet *Asho* before his name. This word has about the same meaning as the Sanskrit word *rishi*.

(*The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. IV, p, 533)

As the tradition goes, "at the time of his birth the ancient faith of Iran, taught by earlier teachers, had fallen into the hands of evil people. Truth, gentleness, charity and other virtues seemed to have disappeared, and Iran was lying crushed. There was none to lead the people aright. At this critical period in the world's history, so say, the *Gathas* of the *Avesta*, Mother Earth appeared before the throne of the Almighty in the shape of a cow (*Geush Urvan*). She raised aloud her voice in complaint : "I have been oppressed and outraged by tyrants, and I cannot bear this suffering any longer. Why hast thou created me ? I see no helper. Save me and send a hero to rescue me. Hearing these words the Supreme Lord, the creator of Mother Earth, soothed her anguish and said : I shall send down Zarathustra. He shall undertake thy succour and shall become thy saviour."

According to the *Cultural Heritage of India* the Prophet was born in the ancient city of Rach (Ragha). His father was Pourushaspa, a prince of the royal house of Iran. Pourushaspa was an extremely pious, learned virtuous prince. He was a great worshipper of the Almighty God. His wife, Dugdhova was an equally virtuous lady. Both were deeply drenched in spirituality.

There are many traditional sayings that the tyrants had terrible dreams. They were told by soothsayers that the child of Pourushaspa would be killing them. So they plotted to destroy him before he was born. The prince came to know their intention. He sent his wife to Rae, her father's house. "So bright was the divine light radiating from the child that it could be seen emanating even through the body of the mother. As the time of birth drew near, the body of mother Dugdhova became more and more radiant with the light that was within her."

The child was first named as *Spitama*.

THE PROPHET

The founder of this great religion of modern Parsis, Zoroaster, propagator of the *Magi* faith which can be described without hesitation as the wisdom for humankind was born, according to the *Avesta* at Airyanam Vaejo, on the river *Daitya*, the old sacred country of the gods. There on the river Dareja stood the house of the Prophet. His name first occurs in a fragment of *Xanthus* and in the *Alcibiades* of Plato "who calls him the son of Oromazdes. Occidental authors describe him a Bactrian, sometimes as a Median or Persian. Children start crying on birth. According to Pliny, the Prophet "laughed on the very day of his birth." This is confirmed by the *Zardusht Nama*. According to Persian tradition the prophet, "out of love to wisdom and righteousness, he withdrew himself from men, and lived in solitude upon a mountain. The mountain was consumed by fire but Zoroaster escaped uninjured and spoke to the multitude."

Another authority, Agathias says "with truth, that it no longer possible to determine with any certainty when he lived and legislated." Quoting the Persians he observed, "The Persians say that Zoroaster lived under Hystaspes, but do not make it clear whether by this name they mean the father of Darius or another Hystaspes. But, whatever his date, he was their teacher and instructor in the Magian religion, modified their former religious customs, and introduced a variegated and composite belief."

It is noted by historians that Darius and his successors were Zoroastrians but there is no clear cut inscription or mention anywhere about his date. Very much like the Indian history of philosophy. Most unfortunately "*The Avesta*, our principal source for the doctrine of Zoroaster, is comparatively reticent on the subject of his person and his life with regard to his date it is naturally enough, absolutely silent."

Even the section *Spend Nask* which was mainly consecrated to the description of his life, "has perished."

Shah Nama, *Zaradust Nama*, written about seven hundred years ago only mentions about his miracles and wonders. *Vendidad*, the holy scripture describes only the Prophet's individual personality. "The personality of Zoroaster is historic, but in the later *Avesta* and in writings of more recent date, he is presented in a legendary light and endowed with superhuman powers. At his appearing all nature rejoices; he enters into conflict with the demons and rids the earth of their presence. Satan approached him as tempter to make him renounce his faith." (*Vendid*, 19.6)

The *Gathas* incorporates his discourses. In fact as very truly described by a scholar, "The *Gathas* alone within the *Avesta* claim to be the *ipsissima Verba* of the prophet, and are called expressly the *Gathas* of the holy Zoroaster, his actual expressions in presence of the assembled congregation, the last genuine survivals of the doctrinal discourses with which—as the promulgator of a new religion—he appeared at the court of King Vishtaspa.

In all the hymns the stress is only on God and Truth. His followers, of course, considered him as a great man, a prophet but not god incarnate.

Unfortunately, although the *Gathas* present the sermons and message of the holy prophet, "they give no historical account of the life and teachings of their Prophet. There are dialogues with God about which there was no doubt.

The prophet was there during the rule of king Vishtaspa has historically been confirmed but this king himself has

not been mentioned in any chronicle or history. Similarly, the *Gathas* too have thrown no light on the topic. However historians agree on one basic point. They all agree to say that "Zoroaster belongs to a pre-historic era. Probably he belonged to the old school of Median Magi, and appeared first in Media as the Prophet of a new faith, but met with sacerdotal opposition, and turned his steps eastward. In the east of Iran, the novel creed first acquired a solid footing and subsequently reacted with success upon the west."

Quite a number of attempts were made on the life of the child but all in vain. These anecdotes sound like the repetition of the events in the life of Srikrishna. The child grew up under the direct supervision and training of his princely father Pourushaspa "who could clearly see the signs that marked out the great teacher." At the age of fifteen, when they were thinking of getting the son married as usual practice prevailed, the young Spitama renounced all worldly pleasures, possessions and desire for a successful life in the world. In his solitary retirement, he strove to unite himself with the great creator. He meditated for more than fifteen years. Finally he got enlightenment.

The enlightened Spitama returned home. He joined his family. Therefrom he started preaching his message of love for the Supreme Creator. "His message was not a new one. He taught the same eternal Truth; he exhorted men to worship the same Supreme Being, as all other great ones had done in other lands and in other ages. The eternal Truth is forgotten time after time, hence in different ages and in different languages it has to be repeated again and again".

People flocked to receive his immortal message. Just as in the case of Lord Buddha, Ananda his cousin became his first disciple, in the case of Zarathustra, his royal cousin Maidhyoimaongha, the son of Pourushaspa's brother Arasti. He continued to be his only disciple for quite a long time. Zarathustra wandered from place to place to preach the divine message but the worldly people hardly paid any heed to it. "It was Bakdhi (Bactria), far to the east, that first

welcomed the Prophet." Vishtapa, the ruler himself became his disciple and with him two ministers.

This was the beginning of the spreading of the new faith. All the wicked princes who opposed him in his own land Iran got defeated one by one. The Prophet lived a long life. In his own life time he was lucky to see his own faith sprouting and flourishing all over Iran and other parts of the world.

Zoroastrianism flourished and deeply influenced the majority of the people in West Asia. We are told that it had spread over vast areas of the Roman Empire too but in a different form which was popularly known as *Mithrcism*. Scholars point out, about the nomenclature of the name of the religion there is some misunderstanding. Although in its place of birth it was popular as Zoroastrianism and in the Roman Empire as *Mithraism*, even in Britain where it had left its imprint to some extent, it is known as Zoroastrianism. There should have been no problem of questioning it. But it is observed by scholars, "The term Zoroastrianism has come to be popularly used by the western scholars as derived from Zoroaster, the Greek form of the original name Zarathustra, the great Prophet of Iran. The term is misleading though. Just as the Muslims call their religion Islam, and not Moham-edanism, so too the Zoroastrians wish their religion to be known as *Mazdayasnism*, which implies the worship of *Ahura Mazda*, meaning the one and only God."

The most important feature of the religion, interestingly enough like the ritualistic practice of the earlier Aryans in Fire worship. Even today no Vedic performance is complete without a sacrificial Fire. Fire is worshipped by the Zoroastrians "only as the symbol of *Ahura Mazda*, since it has the characteristics of brightness and purity."

May be, the religion is of Aryan origin because nobody even today, can say with authority where the Prophet was born. Great historians and scholars like Dr. A. W. Jackson and Prof. E. W. West place his birth at 660 to 583 BC. But

that was not acceptable to all. "This is palpably much too recent as even Pliny of ancient Rome believed that Zoroaster lived five thousand years before the death of Plato."

There are reasons to believe that the Prophet lived during the period when the *Rig Veda* was composed or recited. This section of scholars observe, "in view of the close relationship between the *Vedas* of the Hindu and the *Gathas* of Zoroaster, the date of Zoroaster may well be placed at about five thousand years before Christ, because the *Vedas* themselves have been placed by some scholars at an earlier period."

(*The Gazetteer of India*, Vol. I, p. 458)

THE MAIN MESSAGE

Although there was nothing new, Zarathustra revived the ancient wisdom of the world culture where the enlightened sages and seers of all faiths and religions observed that there is but one God who is the Universal Father, the creator of the world. Zarathustra proclaimed, "There is none beside the creator *Ahura Mazda*. Everything emanates from Him and merges back in Him at the end". No other object is to be worshipped. He suggested six ways to get enlightened. They are known as *Amesha Spentas*—the holy immortals. They are *Asha Vashishta* (Ardibehesht), *Vohu Mano* (Bahman), *Kshathra Vairya* (Sashivar), *Spenta Armaiti* (Spendarmad), *Hourvatat* (Khordad) and *Ameretat* (Amarded). These are the rays from the Eternal Light. They are similarly described as such also in details in the *Gathas*. In the Zoroastrian religion these six emanations "occupy the most important place." There the preacher explains that the "aspirant has to develop along one of these at a time, and meditating on these successively, he integrates them, one by one, within himself."

Asha Vahishta or *asha* had been quite popular with the people for quite a long time. He represented "the divine will." It is on account of *asha* that *Ahura Mazda* Him self is at the head of all evolution and progress. Scholars have been tempted to present the description of *asha* as reflected in the poems of Tennyson who wrote :

celebrated Chinese pilgrim was struck with admiration of the famous royal palace and the houses for dispensing charity and medicine at Pataliputra. He spoke highly of the system of the Government in the Madhya-desa and the benevolence of the people, especially the moneyed classes."

The Main purpose of his visit to India was to collect Buddhist literature. Prof. Basham, before introducing him, observed, "unfortunately" Fa Hien, "was not as observant and informative as Megasthenese." This comment would be redundant, Fa Hien's accounts are of great value to the history of Indian culture.

The pilgrim, however, has given a vivid description of his travels, temples, monasteries and recall many Buddhist legends. He has not touched the details of socio-economic life. Perhaps he concentrated only on his studies and travels of Buddhist scriptures and literature. He stayed in India for a little over six years. He found India prosperous and peaceful. There was rarely any serious crime. The administration was mild. Fa Hien has narrated "it was possible to travel from one end of the country to the other without molestation and without the need for passports. In his remarks on social custom he noted that all respectable people were vegetarians, meat eating being confined to low castes and untouchables, in regard to whom he has given the earliest and clear reference to pollution to approach. He found Buddhism still flourishing but theistic Hinduism was very wide-spread."

He came to India 700 years after Megasthenes. "The mild ethics of Buddhism and Jainism had gradually leavened. Indian society, which was more gentle and humane than in the days of the Mauryas. In place of the old sacrificial Brahmanism, Hinduism had appeared, in form not very different from that of recent centuries. Soon harsher and more primitive elements were to re-emerge but in the best days of the Gupta empire Indian culture reached a perfection which it was never again to attain.

INDIA, THE MOST CIVILISED LAND IN THE WORLD

Fa Hien further added, "At this time India was perhaps

the happiest and most civilised region in the world, for the effect Roman Empire was nearing its destruction, and China was passing through a time of trouble between the two great periods of the Hans and the T'sangs."

About punishment to criminals Fa Hien clearly stated that death penalty was absent. Only fines used to be imposed. In case of sedition or revolt against the State, one hand of the individual used to be amputated.

About food habit Fa Hien categorically mentioned that no meat or fish was ever served. People of only low castes would take non-vegetarian diet. Supporting this viewpoint Professor Basham wrote, "certainly by this time many Hindus of the higher classes were vegetarians. The growth of vegetarianism was of course linked with the doctrine of Non-Violence, which was already old at the time of Fa Hien." It was the influence of the Buddha, the Jains, the teachings of the *Upanishad* that people had spontaneous tendency to go for *Sattvik* vegetarian food.

Sea voyage was popular as was Sea trade. In the fifth century the Chinese pilgrim "who had no reason not to tell truth in this respect travelled from Ceylon to Java in a ship carrying zoo people."

Fa Hein narrated how difficult it was to get manuscripts. He particularly recorded the hardship both by him to procure a copy of the *Vinaya Pitaka*. He himself got a copy of the manuscript of the Buddhist canon *Samjutta Niyaka* which after three decades got translated into Chinese.

A very important event described by the traveller has been the treatment of the poor family by the State. There were big hospitals which were charitable and were founded on donations by the state, public and the rich and specially for poor individuals.

Fa Hien has given many evidences of historic importance. He has given vivid description of Prince Mahendra's penance in the caves as repentance for his tyranny with the ordinary people. Again he has narrated about "a great top built by

Asoka at Pataliputra and the stone pillar near it, fifteen cubics in circumference, and more than thirty in height, on which there was an inscription. Asoka gave the Jambuvipa to the general body of all the monks and then redeemed it from them with money." Fa Hien described how religious processions were popular with the people. These processions used to be organised both by the Hindus and the Buddhists. Fa Hien wrote, "Every year, on the eighth day of the second month they celebrate a procession of images. They make a four wheeled car and on it erect a structure of five stories by means of bamboo tied together. They make figures of *devas* with gold, silver and lapis lazuli grandly blended. On the four sides are riches with a Buddha seated in each and a Buddhista standing in attendance on him. There may be twenty cars, all grand and imposing, but each one different from the other.

(See Legge's translation, p. 79)

Fa Hien also tells us that Asoka had at least three wives. The third wife, Padmavati was the mother of Dharma Vivandhara whose lotus eye, favourite of the emperor made him change his name to Kunal. However, before sending him on a religious mission, Kunal was appointed as the Viceroy of Gandhara. Later, Kunal was sent to quell a revolt at Taxila.

Fa Hien has narrated how Asoka "wished to destroy the eight topes (built on the relics the Buddha's body distributed at his death among eight different peoples) and to build instead of them 8400 topes on the theory that the bones of the human body comprised 84,000 atoms."

(Legge's translation, p. 67)

A COMPARISON OF NOTES BY THE CHINESE PILGRIMS

Exchange of pilgrims and scholars from India to the neighbouring countries was a regular feature in ancient India. Quite a large number of Indian scholars visited China with ancient literature which they themselves translated into Chinese. Many of them never returned home. One such great scholar was Kumarajiva. As we learn from records:—

“Kumarajiva who went to China in 401 A. C. was a prolific writer and as many as forty seven different books, written by him have come down to us. His Chinese style is supposed to be very good. He translated the life of the Great Indian scholar Nagarjuna into Chinese. Jinagupta went to China in the second half of the sixth century A. C. He translated thirty-seven original Sanskrit books into Chinese. His great knowledge was so much admired that an emperor of the T'ang dyansty became his disciple”. Kumarajiva had a disciple whose name was Fa Hien who was fascinated by India. When he met Kumarjiva to bid good bye, the Guru told him “not to spend all his time in gathering religious knowledge only but to get details on the lives and habits of the people so that China might understand them and their country, as a whole. Fa Hien studied at Patala-putra University.”

The most famous of the Chinese travellers to India was Huen Tsang who came in the seventh century. He came during the rule of Harsha.

“In India he travelled all over the country greatly honoured respected everywhere, making accurate observations of places and peoples, and noting down some delightful and some fantastic stories that he heard. Many years he spent at the great Nalanda University, not far from Pataliputra which was famous for its many sided learning and attracted students from far corners of the country. It was said that as many as 10,000 students and monks were residing there. Huen Tsang took the degree of Master of the Law there and finally became vice principal of the university.

Huen Tsang's book the *Si-Yu-Ki* or the Record of the Western Kingdom (meaning India) “makes fascinating reading. Coming from a highly civilised and sophisticated country, at a time when China's capital *Si-an-fu* was a centre of art and learning, his comments on and description of conditions in India were valuable. He has mentioned of the system of education which began early and proceeded by stages to the university where the five branches of knowledge taught were :

(1) Grammar, (2) Science of Arts and Crafts (3) Medicine (4) Logic, and (5) Philosophy. He was particularly struck by the love of learning of the Indian people. Some kind of primary education was fairly widespread as all the monks and priests were teachers. Of the people he noted : "With respect to the ordinary people, although they are naturally light minded, yet they are upright and honourable. In money matters they are without craft, and in administering justice they are considerate. They are not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct, and are faithful in their oaths and promises. In their rules of government there is remarkable efficiency, whilst in their behaviour there is much gentleness and sweetness. With respect to criminals or rebels, there are few in number and only occasionally troublesome. He added "As the administration of the government is founded on benign principles, the execution is simple. People are not subject to forced labour. In this way taxes on people are light. The merchants who engage in commerce go abroad by sea to sell out their transactions. Huen Tsang's "visit to India and the great respect in which he was held, both in China and India, led to the establishment of political contacts between the rulers of the two countries. Harshavardhana of Kannauj and the Tsang Emperor exchanged embassies. Huen Tsang himself remained in touch with India, exchanging letters with friends there and receiving manuscripts. Two interesting letters, originally written in Sanskrit, have been preserved in China. One of these was written in 654 A. C. by an Indian Buddhist scholar, Sthavira Prajnadeva to Huen Tsang. After greeting and news about common friends and their literary work, he proceeded to say : "We are sending you a pair of white clothes to show that we are not forgetful. The road is long, so do not mind the smallness of the present. We wish you may accept it. As regards the *Sutras* and *Shastras* which you may require please send us a list. We will copy them and send them to you. Huen-Tsang in his reply noted : "I learnt from an ambassador who recently came back from India that the great teacher Shilabhadra was no more. This news overwhelmed me with grief that knew no bounds. Among the *Sutra* and *Shastras* that I, Huen Tsang had brought with

me I have already translated the *Yogachārya-bhūmi-Shāstra* and other works, in all thirty volumes. I should humbly let you know that while crossing the Indus I had lost a load of sacred texts. I now send you a list of the texts annexed to this letter. I request you to send them to me if you get the chance. I am sending some small article as presents. Please accept them."

(Bagchi, Dr. P.C. : *India and China*)

Huen Tsang, also described sometimes by historians as Yuan Chwang, a great pilgrim visited India during the latter part of the reign of Harsha in the seventh century A. D. He was a scholarly devotee and dedicated his whole life to exploring Truth. In his search for Truth Huen Tsang visited as many holy spots as he could cover. In the process he got first hand knowledge of the land and the people and their faith.

According to Professor Basham the accounts of Huen Tsang were more authentic. He recorded, Huen Tsang, "wrote a very valuable description of India which, unlike that of Megasthenes, has survived in tact. While his main purpose, like that of Fa Hien, was to obtain Buddhist manuscripts and visit sacred sites, Huen Tsang was less other worldly than the earlier pilgrim. Huen Tsang had easy access to Emperor Harsha, "whom he much admired and who gave him an honoured place at his court. His work is therefore of much greater historical value than of Fa Hien."

(Basham A. L. : *The Wonder That was India*, pp. 69-70)

There are many important events mentioned in the works of Huen Tsang. It helped equally the historians as much as the students of comparative religion as a guide of seventh century India as depicted by an eye witness account.

Many of the earlier statements by his colleague Fa Hien were clearly contradicted by Huen Tsang. For instance, "Fa Hien recorded that the death penalty was not imposed in Northern India, but most crime was punished by fines, and that only serious revolt was punished by the amputation of one hand. The Chinese traveller might have exaggerated, but his testimony at least suggested that executions were rare.

Huen Tsang, 200 years, later, reported that prisoners were not executed under Harsha, but were left to rot in dungeons."

Huen Tsang described Mahendra as the brother of Asoka, the great, according to him Asoka, the kind hearted emperor was in tears when he got reports about Mahendra's atrocities, violation of laws, oppressing the people mercilessly. His Ministers has to report the matter to the emperor. "Then Asoka in tears explained to his brother how awkward was his position due to his conduct. Mahendra, confessing guilt, asked for a reprieve of seven days, during which by the practice of contemplation in a dark chamber he became an *arhat* and was granted cave dwellings at Pataliputra for his residence".

Fa-Hien however gave a different story. He narrated how Asoka's brother (he did not mention Mahendra by name) had retired to a lonely place on a hillock "which he was loath to leave though the King sincerely revered him and wished and begged him to come and live in his family where he could supply all his wants."

Huen Tsang also gives us authentic views about the spiritual preceptor of Asoka who almost turned his whole life style. Huen Tsang confidently maintained that "Asoka's preceptor in Buddhism was Upagupta of Mathura, the son of the perfumer Gupta of Benaras, who took his imperial pupil, escorted by a mighty army, on an extensive pilgrimage to the principal holy places of Buddhism viz. Lumbini Garden where the Venerable one was born, Kapilavastu where he renounced the world, Bodhi tree at Gaya where he attained enlightenment, Isipatana (Sarnath) were he mostly lived and taught, and where there were the stupas of some of his chief disciples like Sariputra, Mandgalayana and Ananda."

Huen Tsang recorded that at all these holy spots, the emperor made gifts and built *Chaitya*.

This Upagupta as recorded by Huen Tsang as the guru of Asoka, has been identified by modern scholars as Moggaliputra Tissa.

Asoka founded two cities. Srinagar in Kashmir was the first. There he built 500 Buddhist monasteries. Huen Tsang

noted that "Asoka gave up all Kashmir for benefit of the Buddhist Church." The Chinese pilgrim visited himself more than one hundred Buddhist monasteries "then still existing in the country." He also saw "four Asoka topes". The second city built by Asoka was in Nepal which he had visited with his daughter Charumati and her husband Devapala "who chose to settle there, building respectively a nunnery and a monastery."

Huen Tsang mentioned 80 *Stupas* and *Viharas*, besides the 500 *Viharas* of Kashmir and other large groups of the same in different localities. "One of the *stupas* found by Huen Tsang to the north west of Vaisali, which was erected to mark the place where the Buddha in one of his previous births ruled as a Chakravarty, may be his previous births ruled as a Chakravarty, may be identified as the *stupa* now found at Kesariya, the Stupa of the Raja Kesari, if may be so taken."

(Mookherjee R.K. : *Asoka*, p. 83)

It will be interesting to go through the list of the holy spots identified by the great Chinese pilgrim.

ASOKAN TOPES

Huen Tsang noticed the following Asokan Topes during entire stay in India Kapis (Kafiristan)—I (containing the Buddha's relics) ; Nagar (Jalalabad) 2 ; Udyana-I (Where the Buddha, as king Sivi, sliced his body to ransom a pigeon from a hawk) ; Taxila-2 (the tope where the Buddha gave his head away in charity, and the tope marking the spot where Prince Kunala had his eyes torn out by the guile of his step-mother) ; Sinhapur-3 (including the one where the Buddha fed the hungry tigress by his body) ; Uras-I ; Kashmir-4 (with the Buddha's relics); Sthaneswara-I, Srughna-I, Govisana-I (where the Buddha preached ; Ahichochhatra-I, Pilosanna-I Kanauj-2 (where the Buddha preached) ; Hayamukha-I (Where the Buddha preached) ; Prayaga-I (where the Buddha preached) ; Sravasti-I (with relics) Kapilavastu-3 (to mark places where the Buddha was born, had the first bath, and met and taught his father after his Buddhahood) ; Ramagrama-3 (to mark the places where the Buddha cut off his hair and stopped to turn

back his groom Chandaka) ; Kusinagara-2 (the second to mark the place of the divisions of the relics among the eight kings) ; Sarnath-2 Ghazipur-I (with relics and where the Buddha had also preached) ; Mahasala (near Arrah)-2 the second to mark the place where were deposited the relics and jar of the Brahman Drons, also called the Kumbha Stupa) ; Vaisali-2 ; Vajji-I (where the Buddha preached) Gaya-I (where the Buddha uttered the *Ratnamegha Sutra*) ; Bodh Gaya-I (where to mark the place where the grass cutter gave the Buddha grass for his seat) ; Pataliputra-I (for relics) ; Rajagriha-2 ; near Nalanda-3 (one marking the place of Mudgalaputra's birth and death, and the other of the Buddha's preaching) ; Tamralipti-I Karnasuvarna—several topes to mark the places where the Buddha preached ; Orissa—more than 10 topes to mark places of Buddha's teaching ; South Kosala-I (where the Buddha defeated the Tirthikas in argument) ; Chola country-I ; Dravida and Kanchi several topes ; Maharastra-5, Valabhi several topes ; Pofato (near Multan)-4 ; Afantu (in Sindh)-I, and Sindh with "some tens of topes as memorials of the Buddha's visits."

VIHARAS

Huen Tsang visited the Asokarama or Kukkutarama at Pataliputra, which was large enough to accommodate, according to the tradition recorded by Yuan-Chwang, an assembly of 1000 monks ; according to other authorities (Watters ii.98) "300,600 monks assembled there to attend Asoka's first Quinquennial Festival of the holy priesthood." Huen Tsang also mentioned "Some tens of cave dwelling given by Asoka to his preceptor, Upagupta, at Pataliputra, and also to other *arhats*."

Huen Tsang mentioned names like Nihirkula, a mighty monarch of Huna origin who was "a fierce persecutor of Buddhism."

Huen Tsang also spoke of the four classes of people in Indian society and "many mixed classes, no doubt accepting the orthodox view of the time that these sprang from inter-marriage of the four, but he showed clear knowledge of the instance of caste in its modern form."

Black magic was still in prevalence. Huen Tsang mentioned that certain monasteries were found "permeated with magical practices." India was well afforested. Dense jungles skirted the river Ganga for miles together.

About educational pattern and philosophical trend of mind of the people, the Chinese traveller's account has been accepted as the most authentic. Acknowledging debt to the great Chinese pilgrim, Prof. Basham recorded, "Our knowledge of the day to day life of Nalanda depends chiefly on Huen Tsang, who shows us the monastery in the 7th century as full of intellectual activity. Under its aged and saintly abbot, Shilabhadra, Nalanda did not confine itself to training Buddhist novices, but also taught the *Vedas*. Hindu philosophy, logic, grammar and medicine. It would seem that the student population was not confined to the Buddhist order but that candidates of other faiths who succeeded in passing a strict oral examination were admitted."

According to Huen Tsang, "Nalanda was supported by the revenues of an enormous estate of one hundred villages, and by the alms of many patrons, including the great Harsha himself; it provided free training for no less than 10,000 students, who had a large staff of servants to wait on them."

I-TSING—THE CHINESE PILGRIM (671-695 A.D.)

One such great name who came to gather knowledge on Buddhist philosophy is I-Tsing. Although Huen Tsang (or also spelt as Huenchang) was more popular with the students of Indian History, I-tsing, it would seem left an equally important detailed account of his more than twenty years learning at Nalanda University. He specialised, spread and preached the message of the enlightened Buddha not only in China, he had expressed his appreciation of the technique of educational system in India during those days.

Max Mueller laid great stress and importance on the accounts by I-tsing although he did not agree with all his accounts. For instance when I-tsing himself a student at Nalanda University for a long time has given vivid description of the education system and pattern of teaching he quoted

him extensively in his book *What India Can Teach Us*. But he vehemently protested when the pilgrim student recorded that there was no written manuscript on any book during those days. Max Mueller could quote instances when Indian manuscripts had been sent even to China, the land from where I-tsing hailed and that they were duly translated into Chinese. Oral matter it is difficult to surmise could hardly be translated, that too in a foreign land.

Another important thing revealed by the accounts left by I-tsing has been that there was regular exchange of students from China to India and *vice versa*. But the ancient lands with lofty cultural heritages had regular cultural intercourses.

Max Mueller himself recorded about the detailed accounts left by I-tsing. He wrote, "About a thousand years ago a Chinese, of the name of I-tsing, a Buddhist, went to India to learn Sanskrit, in order to be able to translate some of the sacred books of his own religion, which were originally written in Sanskrit, into Chinese." He left China in 671, twenty five years after Hiuen-Tsang's return, arrived at Tamralipti in India in 673, and went to the great College and Monastery of Nalanda, where he studied Sanskrit. He returned to China in 695 and died in 713.

"In one of his works which he still possessed in Chinese, he gave account of what he saw in India, not only among his own co-religionists, the Buddhists, but likewise among the Brahmanas," observed Max Mueller.

Of the Buddhist priests, the pilgrim recorded that "after they have learnt to recite the five and the ten precepts, they were taught the 400 hymns of *Matricheta*, and afterward the 150 hymns of the same poet. When they were able to recite these, they begin the study of the Sutras of their Sacred Canon. They also learnt by heart the *Jatakamala*, which gave an account of Buddha in former states of existence. Speaking of what he called the islands of the Southern Sea, which he visited after leaving India. I-tsing noted : There are more than ten islands in the South Sea. There both priests and laymen recite the *Jatakamala*, as they recite the

hymns mentioned before : but it has not yet been translated into Chinese."

I-tsing further narrated how one of these stories, was verified by a king and set to music and was performed before the public with a band and dancing—evidently a Buddhist mystery play.

I-tsing has given a vivid account of the system of education. "Children", he said, learn the forty-nine letters and the 10,000 compound letters when they were six years old, and generally finished them in half a year. This corresponded to about 300 verses, each *sloka* of thirty-two syllables. It was originally taught by Mahesvara. At eight years, children begin to learn the grammar of Panini, and know it after about eight months. It consists of 1000 *slokas* called *Sutras*.

Then followed the list of roots and the three appendices, consisting again of 1,000 *slokas*. Boys began the three appendices when they were ten years old, and finished them in three years."

"When they reached the age of fifteen, they began to study a commentary on the grammar (*Sutra*) and spent five years in learning it. And here I-tsing gives the following advice to his countrymen, many of whom came to India to learn Sanskrit but seemed to have learnt it only imperfectly. "If men of China, he wrote, go to India, wishing to study there, they should first of all learn these grammatical works, and then only other subjects ; if not, they will merely waste their labour. These works should be learnt by heart. But this is suited for men of high quality only. They should study hard day and night, without letting a comment pass for idle repose. They should be like Confucius, through whose hard study the binding of his Yih-king was three times cut asunder, being worn away ; and like Sui-shili, who used to read a book repeatedly one hundred times. Then followed a remark, more intelligible in Chinese than in English : "The hairs of bull are counted by thousands, the horn of a unicorn is only one."

The standard of education reached a very high quality. I-tsing spoke of the degree of perfection which was indeed

very high, to which the memory of these students attained both among Buddhists and heretics. 'Such men', he noted "could commit to memory the contents of two volumes, learning them only once."

And then turning to the heretics, or what we should call the orthodox Brahmans, he observed: "The Brahmans are regarded throughout the five divisions of India as the most respectable. They do not walk with the other three castes, and other mixed classes of people are still further dissociated from them. They revere their Scriptures, the four *Vedas*, containing about 100,000 verses. The *Vedas* are handed down from mouth to mouth, not written on paper. There are in every generation some intelligent Brahmans who can recite those 100,000 verses. I myself saw such men."

Here then we have an eye-witnesses who, in the seventh century after Christ, visited India, learnt Sanskrit, and spent about twenty years in different monasteries—a man who had no theories of his own about oral tradition, but who, on the contrary, as coming from China, was quite familiar with the idea of a written, nay, of a printed literature: and yet what did he say? "The *Vedas* are not written on paper, but handed down from mouth to mouth".

Here Prof. Max Mueller had not agreed with the pilgrim student. He recorded, "I do not quite agree here with I-tsing. At all events, we must not conclude from what he says that there existed no Sanskrit MSS. at all at his time. We know they existed. We know that in the first century of our era Sanskrit MSS, were carried from India to China and translated there. Most likely therefore there were MSS not allowed to be used by students, and that they had always to learn the *Veda* by heart and from the mouth of a properly qualified teacher. The very fact that in the later law-books severe punishments are threatened against persons who copy the *Veda* or learn it from MSS, showed that MSS existed. and that their existence interfered seriously with the ancient privileges of the Brahmans, as the only legitimate teachers of their sacred scriptures".

Prof. Max Mueller substantiated his theory emphatically by observing that "If now, after having heard this account of I-tsing we go back for about another thousand years, we shall feel less sceptical in accepting the evidence which we find in the so-called *Pratisakhya*s that is, collections of rules which so far as we know at present, go back to the fifth century before our era, and which tell us almost exactly the same as what we can see in India at the present moment namely that the education of children of the three twice-born castes, the *Brahmanas*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaisyas*, constituted in their passing at least eight years in the house of a *Guru*, and learning by heart the ancient Vedic hymns."

I-tsing repeatedly described how "the art of teaching had even at that early time been reduced to a perfect system and at that time certainly there is not the slightest trace of anything, such as a book, or skin, or parchment, a sheet of paper, pen or ink being known even by name to the people of India : while every expression connected with what we should call literature, points to a literature (we cannot help using that word) existing in memory only and being handed down with the most scrupulous care by means of oral tradition".

On this important point Max Mueller concluded, "I had to enter into these details because I know that, with our ideas of literature, it requires an effort to imagine the bare possibility of a large amount of poetry, and still more of prose, existing in any but a written form. And yet here too we only see what we see elsewhere, namely that man, before the great discoveries of civilisation were made, were able by greater individual efforts to achieve what to us accustomed to easier contrivances, seems almost impossible."

At any rate, the description left by the pilgrim student formed a landmark in the cultural relations between the two great civilisations of the world—India and China. What was most important about this pilgrim was his humility, his deep reverence for the scripture he learnt and for the teachers who taught him. He showed little concern for political conditions, in which perhaps he had the least interest.

IBN BATUTA**(1304-77)**

A very important foreign traveller who left a detailed account of India's cultural and socio-economic life during the fourteenth century was Ibn Batuta. Batuta visited India in 1334 A.D. He was in Delhi for quite some time. Delhi, according to him "was full of *Sufis* and *Ulemas*."

(Basham A.L. : *A Cultural History of India*, p. 254)

Ibn Bututa came to Delhi as a traveller during the reign of Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Bututa was a widely travelled "geographer", as Prof. Basham described him. He considered Delhi as "one of the principal cities of Asia." Bututa's monumental *Rehta* give a very authentic account of contemporary India. This Moorish travellers's accounts are today treated as significant by Historians of the world, who are dedicated to describe in detail the socio, economic, political and cultural history of India, particularly during the reign of one of the most progressive rulers like Mohammad Bin Tughluq.

Unlike the Chinese travellers, this account and a few other minor ones, stress details mainly on trade aspects. It was during this period that India was having a flourishing trade with the Arab world. "During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries many merchants, *Sufis* and scholars came to Multan and Baluch through the Vhuran, Tochi, and Gonal passes. These areas were studded with flourishing centres of *Sufism* as with trade centres. By this time a close connection had developed between the Muslim craft and trade guilds and *Sufi* saints ; in fact many eminent *Sufis* had originally been merchants or artisans. Some Chisti *Sufis* of India had close links of this kind, and depended for their subsistence on cash gifts from merchants rather than on permanent revenue grants from official sources, which would have made them dependent upon fluctuating political power."

Luckily details about Ibn Batuta are available. He himself must have maintained a diary from where he has given vivid descriptions of the socio, economic and cultural lives of the people of both North and South India. It was recorded "Ibn Batuta arrived at Delhi late in 1333 or early 1334. The

Moorish traveller's account in his *Tuhfat-un-Nuzzar fi Gharaib-il-Amsar*, of his journeys and sojourn in India, throw much light on the conditions of the country, the character of its sovereign, and many other details.

He arrived, at the mouth of the Indus on Sept. 12, 1333, and his arrival, as he was a foreigner, had to be reported to Qutb-ul-mulk, the Governor of the city of Multan. He described a rebellion at Sihwan not mentioned in the general histories of the reign, which had been suppressed shortly before his arrival."

Historians unanimously describe Ibn Batuta as "the most outstanding traveller". His real name Abu Abdullah. He was not fascinated by long travels.

Giving details of his long journey to India, the scholar has recorded, "Starting from his native place Tangiers, in Morocco, he travelled all over North Africa, Arabia, Persia and Constantinople and came over the land route to India (734/1333) during the reign of Mohammed Bin Tughlaq who appointed him *Qadi* of Delhi, an office he held for eight years."

Batuta who was one of the ardent admirers of the Sultan as what in normal course of time usually happen with such highly placed whimsical individuals could not toe the royal feet and "incurred the Sultan's displeasure." Ibn Batuta was even thrown into the prison by the whimsical emperor who has been described as—"the great tyrant," who harassed the entire population of Delhi when he transferred his capital from Delhi to Devagiri and back.

The emperor soon changed his mind and released him. To get rid of the intelligent traveller who knew all the important individuals and royal secrets, the Sultan appointed him as an ambassador to China.

Ibn Batuta unfortunately, could not reach China because of a ship disaster. He got into trouble because of the shipwreck. The Sultan was already annoyed with the traveller. Shrewd and intelligent as he was, Ibn Batuta did not return immediately to India. He preferred living quietly at Maldive Islands for quite some time. But India fascinated him After a year or so, Batuta sailed back to India and landed this time in South India. From there he took a ship to China again.

He was himself a religious man. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and therefrom returned to his own country in 1349. He was a restless traveller by nature. So he made another short journey this time to Central Africa. Thereafter he settled down in Morocco. There Ibn Batuta wrote down his accounts on India and his travel to other lands. He gave dictations to one Mohammed Ibn Jwzi, who was a scholarly person and who patiently and painstakingly edited them under the title *Tuhfat-un, Nuzzar fi Chara' ib-ul Amsar wa Ajaib-ul-Afsarar Rehla*. This has been the main source of contemporary India. "This is a valuable storehouse of information on the political and social institutions of the period. As an independent writer, Ibn Batuta was more reliable than the historians who were deeply concerned with the favour or frown of the Sultan. His work, however, is not free from shortcomings. He did not know Persian well and had no knowledge of the local languages. Not infrequently he lent a credulous ear to rumour and gossip and frequently mixed up fiction with fact."

And yet he stood as the most outstanding traveller giving an eyewitness living account of contemporary India.

Batuta, a well intentioned traveller and a religiously pious person, and a close associate of the royal palace had, as a foreigner to face many practical difficulties. Besides ignorance of local language, Batuta found even the physical climate not befitting his temperament. He arrived in India at a time when the whimsical Sultan, Mohammed Bin Tughlaq mercilessly massacred his own subjects. So even politically, his first visit made him shift the place.

"Ibn Batuta, who was compelled by the heat of the weather to sleep in the open air, had to hasten his departure from the city. After some stay at Multan he travelled by way of Abohar, Pakpattan, Sirsa, Hansi to Delhi. His account of the journey illustrated Mohammad's lavish hospitality to foreigners visiting his dominions and the disorder prevailing in the country." He was lucky to draw immediate royal hospitality.

"We learn from Batuta's own record, "When he reached Delhi Mohammad was in the Kanauj district, but the minister

Khwaja Jahan, saw that he and his fellow travellers were well received at the capital. The King's generosity to these strangers, who had no claims on him, was fantastic. Ibn Batuta himself received 6000 tangas in cash, a grant of three villages within thirty miles of Delhi which gave him an annual income of 5000 tangas, and ten Hindu slaves."

"Some months later Mohammad returned from Kanauj, and on June 8, 1334, reached Tilpat. Ibn Batuta was among those who went forth to meet him, and described the king's kindly reception of himself and others, his ceremonial entry into the capital and the great honour shown to foreigners, to whom he was ever solicitous to attract to his court. They were offered appointment, which few were prepared to accept, for they were, for the most part, mere beggars who had visited India with the object of amassing wealth as quickly as possible and carrying it back to their own countries. Ibn Batuta, to whose original grant two other villages were added and whose annual stipend was fixed at 12,000 tangas, was willing to work for his bread, but hesitated to accept the post of *Qazi* of Delhi on the ground of his ignorance of the language of the country and of his attachment to the Maliki sect of the Sunnis whose practice differed somewhat from that of the Hanafi sect, whose religion was established in India. The king removed both obstacles by offering to appoint two assistants, who would perform the duties of the post while Ibn Batuta enjoyed the stipend."

Batuta has given detailed account of Tughluq who too patronised him. For instance he referred to the Arabic inscription of Tughluq on the Friday mosque of Multan where it was mentioned that 29 times Tughluq had to encounter invaders. There was hardly any place due to constant interference by the adventurers. Batuta has also given details about royal conspiracies and strategies. All world famed historians, including Wolseley Haig, accept his description and details about the Tughluques as final. For instance there were controversies even about the nomenclature of Tughluq. Stanley Lane Poole preferred Tughluq, Sir Aurel Stein described it as Taghlik. "I follow the traveller Ibn Batuta who is explicit on the point and must have known how the word was

pronounced at Delhi in his day seeing that Mohammed Tughluq was his patron."

(Haig, W. : *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, p. 127)

Tughluq was much in advance of his time. A rigid Muslim was against wine "He was devoid of personal pride and vanity." His son's succession has been described in detail by Ibn Batuta.

India had an excellent postal system. "Posts were carried by horseman called *Ulaq* or by runners, called *dawat*. It is interesting to know the details of the communication system Batuta described how "Each (runner) carried a staff tipped with copper belts and when he left a post town he took his letters in his left hand and his staff in his right, shaking it so that the bells jingled, and ran at full speed towards the next post house, where a runner warned of his approach by the sound, awaited him, took the letters from him and ran at full speed in like manner toward the next post house."

Ibn Batuta has also given vivid description of Tughluqabad which was quite a site to enjoy. "Here, said Ibn Batuta were Tughluq's treasures and palaces, and the great palace which he had built of stone as with gilded bricks, which when the sun rose, shone so dazzlingly that none could gaze steadily upon it. There he laid up great treasures, and it was related that he constructed there a cistern and had molten gold poured into it so that it could become one solid mass."

Justice was accorded to all irrespective of being a Hindu or Muslim. Actions were taken against the Qazi's if they gave wrong judgement against Hindus. There were at least three such cases mentioned by Ibn Batuta.

About Batuta's imaginary stories, an eminent historian Dr. R.C. Majumdar recorded, for instance, his story about Sultana Razia's romance with the Abyssinian Slave Jalal-uddib-yaqut, who was elevated to the post of Master of Stables, as wrong. Dr. Majumdar has written "Ibn Batuta wrongly states that her fondness for the Abyssinian was criminal." May be "there was a very great degree of familiarity" between the Abyssinian and the queen" so much so that when she rode he always lifted her on horse by raising her up under the arms."

All the contemporary chroniclers however agreed with Ibn Batuta for instance when he recorded that the Delhi Sultan Khusro "favoured the Hindus" and in his brief regime of less than six months many Hindus got higher assignments. About numismatic renovation and introduction of six jital coins (*shashghani*) the facts were confirmed by historians too.

About facilities to travellers, specially from foreign countries, Batuta like other travellers from European countries described in detail about the hospitality accorded to them all. "The Sultan (Mohammed Bin Tughluq) did his best to make the new capital a suitable abode for his officers and the people by providing it with beautiful buildings, the splendour of which has been described by Ibn Batuta, Badul Hamid Lahori the court historian of Shah Jehan's reign and the European travellers of the seventeenth century, all immigrants. A spacious road was constructed for their convenience with shady trees being planted on both sides of it and a regular post established between Delhi and Daulatabad." Ibn Batuta's story of the Sultan's fantastic idea of conquering Tibet and China as described in his travel book were imaginary.

Jawaharlal Nehru in his *Discovery of India* wrote that Ibn Batuta was appointed as an Indian envoy to China by the Delhi Sultan Mohammad Bin Tughluq. He further noted "Even during the Indo-Afghan and Mughal period in India there was occasional diplomatic intercourse between India and China. Mohammad Bin Tughluq, Sultan of Delhi (1326-57) sent the famous Arab traveller, Ibn Batuta as ambassador to the Chinese court. Bengal had at that time shaken off the suzerainty. In the middle of the fourteenth century, the Chinese court sent two ambassadors, Hue-Shien and Fin-Shien, to the Bengal Sultan. This led to a succession of ambassadors being sent from Bengal to China during Sultan Ghias-uddin's reign."

Jawaharlal Nehru's observation that Batuta had exaggerated about description has been based only on surmise. In his *Discovery of India*, Nehru wrote "Delhi flourished as an imperial capital. Ibn Batuta, a famous Arab traveller from Morocco, who visited many countries and saw many cities from Cairo and Constantinople to China, described it in the fourteenth

century, perhaps with some exaggeration as one of the greatest cities in the universe."

In fact, Batuta did not mention universe. He gave a first hand account, not from books but from his personal knowledge after trekking long distances that Delhi was one of the finest cities among Asian countries.

Batuta, did not restrict his travel only to north India. He extensively visited also southern India. It has been recorded "in the 14th century Ibn Batuta travelled over the country north as well as South. He mentioned in his writings the products and trades of Northern India, as also the foreign commerce, shipbuilding industry and wealth of the coastal regions in South."

(*The Gazetteer of India*, Vol. II, p. 395)

People were happy. The description of palaces, the gold amassed by the royal treasury clearly described the prosperous condition of India during the days of Ibn Batuta. He described with great pleasure and surprise how things were cheap particularly in Bengal which he was so happy to have visited. Ibn Batuta observed that "he had nowhere seen a country where the commodities sell cheaper than in Bengal. Eight *dirhans* were sufficient here for the annual expenses of a family of three." But he did not leave any account or estimated the average income or cost of living of India in those days.

Finally Batuta left India, a sad man. Obviously he had no intention of leaving a land for which he grew a special love. We are told by a great scholar "On July 22, 1342, Ibn Batuta left Delhi. Favoured foreigner though he was, his life had been twice in danger. In terror for his own life, he was sickened by the daily spectacle of the king's cruelty. "Many a time, "he wrote "I saw the bodies of the slain at his gate, thrown there. One day my horse shied under me and I saw something white on the ground and asked what it was, and my companions told me that it was the breast of a man who had been cut into three pieces. The king slew both small and great and spared not the learned, the pious or the noble. Daily there were brought to the council hall men in chains, fetters, and bonds, and they were led away, some to execution, some to torture, and some to scourging. On every day except Friday there was a

goal delivery, but on Friday the prisoners were not led out, and it was on that day only that they took their case and cleared themselves. May God preserve us from such calamities. "Muhammad took advantage of Ibn Batuta's desire to leave India and intention of continuing his travels to appoint him his envoy to China. During the expedition into the Himalayas, a temple or shrine to which Chinese pilgrims resorted had been destroyed, and the emperor of China had sent a mission seeking leave to rebuild it. Muhammad was prepared to grant this permission on condition that the worshippers paid *Jizya*, the poll-tax levied from idolators, and Ibn Batuta, with a hundred followers, was deputed to accompany the Chinese mission on its return and to deliver this decision. He was accompanied to the point of embarkation by an escort of 1000 horses without which it would have been unsafe to travel through Muhammad's dominions, and his account of his journey disclosed the deplorable condition of the country.

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Peace, The Eternal Message of Indian Culcture

Bertrand Russel, among other famous books, also wrote one entitled "Science and Religion." It was a fascinating book. In the section on religion the great philosopher, dealt with transcendal peace of mind. Any Indian would be thrilled to read the book, especially the section of Indian Yoga system. It is all the more interesting because appreciation on Indian Yoga has come from the facile pen of a great mind who in the beginning had no faith in religion but as a philosopher Scientist commanded great respect throughout the world.

Any reader would appreciate the approach of the Scientist philosopher for his earnest quest for real human values, which are fast diminishing. Not only India, but the whole world undergoing great mental agony as a result of this deterioration. The whole world would be nearing its doomsday because of the armed race and heavy concentration of nuclear weapons which is only a negation of progress of humankind.

Swami Ranganathananda too wrote years ago a book entitled, *Eternal Values*. It has since been revised and enlarged and the new version give in detail a mine of information on the art of culturing the mind. The learned Swami wrote in this excellent analysis, "That man is modern who is

inquisitive, who has a passion for truth and the power of rational investigation, who never takes things for granted but always strives to get at the heart of things and constantly asks what next, what next."

There is not the iota of doubt that the whole world is in utter bewilderment. There is no proper respect or dignity for man. There is no mutual understanding of the real causes of agony of humankind. In the race for power which is only temporal, the leaders of the major world powers are ignoring the main purpose of life, *viz.*, living together in peace and harmony.

People who really matter, people who love to live and peacefully throughout the world are now changing their attitudes. The nations have realised at a heavy cost that it will not be through competition but co-operation that the basic foundation of the new social order would lie.

Surprisingly enough, during the last five thousand years since the days of the *Rig Veda*, India has been the first country pleading and praying for peace for humankind. Every *mantra* of the *Upanishad*, *Purana* or even daily prayer and with the uttering of the time old *mantra Om Shanti Om*. Peace be with all.

All our religions—Hindu, Buddhists, Jain, Parsis, Sikhs, Christians, Musalmans—in all their prayers conclude with an utterance that lay the greatest stress on peace for all.

All the great saints of India belonging to all regions and religions have been earnestly pleading for peace. Without peace no human being or a nation survives or can progress. To quote Sri Aurobindo "The fundamental idea of all Indian religions is one common to the highest human thinking everywhere."

India's Culture has always maintained a steady, calm, non-aggressive approach to life in keeping with the tradition of her people. The main stress has always been on higher thoughts whether it came from one's religious faith or whether it came from the East or West. The natural meaning had never been lost sight of. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, "A people's philosophy and higher thinking give us its mind's purest, largest

and most general formulation of its consciousness of life and its dynamic view of existence. Its religion formulates the most intense form of its upward will and the soul's aspiration towards the fulfilment of its highest ideal and impulse. Its art, poetry, literature provide for us the creative expression and impression of its intuition, imagination, vital turn and creative intelligence. Its society and politics provide in their forms an outward frame in which the more external life works out what it can of its inspiring ideal and of its special character and nature under the difficulties of the environment."

In all these aspects and fields of activities, any scholar with an analytical mind after deeper investigation, will find the only common factor among all her peoples from all walks of life has been peace. Her peace-loving people have a knack for adapting themselves to any situation provided it leads them to peace. That was the guiding principle behind settlement of all international problems even where the First Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru introduced and popularised the concept of a dialogue before any confrontation. Today that has become the most important method of solving any intriguing problem.

Our Saints, poets and national leaders realised this great truth long back. At the root of maladies lie the lust for power, greed and lack of proper human values. Indian sages and seers have been proclaiming time and again that true peace of mind comes only through renunciation. That may not be possible for the whole nation but certainly one may cultivate a habit to see that his neighbour does not die of hunger when he amasses huge amount of money and wealth. There is a great urge or satisfaction in sharing of joy or grief.

In the words of the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, "India has had its ages of silver and gold but the highest honour has always been reserved for the sage and the ascetic rather than for the king and even among temporal rulers, those who exemplified wisdom and obedience to *Dharma* have ranked above mere warriors. Renunciation and not acquisition, restraint not indulgence, is the essence of Indian Culture."

There has hardly been a better definition to Indian Culture than the description that it carried in its womb, the seed of world peace.

Rabindranath Tagore, in his *Crisis of Civilisation* warned the big powers of the world against their drive to banish peace. Wars are the worst catastrophes. Indian Culture, in a great sense, is the unique experiment of peace after many conflicts—mental and physical. The mental conflict of the sages made them leave everything in search of peace. There are cases, of at least a dozen kings in India who left their royal robes and palaces and spent years in deep meditation and penance. In the long run they attained peace—peace for themselves and for the whole world. Buddha was a prince, Mahavira was a prince. *Vartrihari*, King and author of *Vairagya Satakam* left the throne. Yamunacharya, the great preceptor of Acharya Ramanujacharya ruled the kingdom for twenty six years. They left everything in search of only one thing—peace of mind.

The entire works of Rabindranath Tagore are based on the *Upanishads*. Drenched in the thoughts of renunciation and peace for all, the modern seer and poet could not tolerate the crazy race of world powers for usurpation of material power at the cost of peace. He lodged the biggest protest as his eighty year old life in his book. *Crisis of Civilisation* which also was his last work. That reflected the ideas of protest by the entire Indian society. It was a protest, based on the message of Indian Culture of harmony and peace. It was not his solitary voice. It was the voice of India. Tagore wrote, in quite a strong language much against his true nature, sounding a strong note of warning against wholesale massacre. He clearly and categorically blamed the Western countries for the debacle brought to civilisation by the two world wars in the space of hardly three decades. It would take centuries to build up a civilisation. It hardly took moments to crush it. Tagore clearly showed the wrong done by these megalomaniacs in their value judgments.

Recently that voice was echoed in another note of warning by the poet's illustrious student and disciple, the late Mrs.

Indira Gandhi. In many world conferences, she pointed out that modern outlook is disgracing out of proportion more and more mechanically. Notwithstanding the great discoveries and scientific innovations and inspite of astounding progress made, man's greed for more and more materialistic acquisition has made him disgruntled and unsatisfied. There is no limit to human demand. People endowed with greater value judgment and who previously believed in simple living with high thinking, have also unfortunately joined the rat race. The whole outlook, attitude and climate of education have undergone a revolutionary change. Education is becoming more and more mechanical and professionalised in its approach. Instead of imparting training for life, modern education attaches hardly any attention to values, so essential for man's peaceful existence. There is today hardly any co-ordination between studies in science and humanities. Even the basic knowledge of both, which is so essential to any student is missing from our present educational exercises. There is no harmony in our present knowledge process, no harmony in knowledge in the two main branches of the existing education system. There is a big gap between our lack of assimilation of both science and humanities.

Scientists feel religion does not come within their purview. All, at least all great Scientists like Albert Einstien, Huxley, Bose, Russel felt the existence of a super natural power beyond the experiments in a laboratory. Mere conquest of moon does not satisfy humankind. It still searches the secret of real peace.

Addressing a gathering of eminent world figures, Mrs. Gandhi presented this immortal secret of World Peace when she observed, "The present crisis of civilisation is not so much the clash of cultures as what to do with violence, not only that which is stored in nuclear arsenals but the growing and pointless violence of ordinary people and their callousness. In the last few centuries, under the impetus of the industrial revolution, Governments, industry and profession have concentrated on what is called efficiency. Greater consumption but less satisfaction, which was the problem of the affluent indivi-

dual throughout history has now become the problem of entire countries. Education, the purpose of which was originally to enable the individual to come to terms in life, often unsettles balance. It is education for efficiency, not for harmony. The educated are unable to reconcile the 'two cultures', the humanities and sciences, and still less to assimilate them within their distinctive inner personalities. Progress has dried the springs of spontaneity."

(*Towards a New Synthesis in Civilisation*
Speech at Paris, November 12, 1981)

This knowledge, with a proper value judgment has to be inculcated specially with spirit of humility and service to man. In the epic *Mahabharata*, the great sage Vyasa noted that above anything on earth is the place of man. Man is the greatest Truth. Above, man there is no greater Truth. Mere bookish knowledge will lead one to nowhere. We must understand our mutual relations between man and men. The *Mahabharata* said, "Learning is one and virtue is quite another. It is true that one should know the difference between good and evil, if one is to seek good and shun evil but this knowledge should soak into every thought and influence every act in one's life. Then indeed knowledge becomes virtue. The knowledge, that is merely so much undigested information crammed into the mind, cannot instil virtue. It is just an outward show like our clothes and is no real part of us."

(Rajagopalachari, C. : *Mahabharata*, p. 122)

For peace, what is needed today is mutual understanding, adjustment, proper value judgment, respect for this earthly life, dignity of man and above everything else, a warm heart filled with love, compassion and sympathy. This has been the teaching of almost all major religions. Unfortunately the world today is filled with mutual distrust, suspicion and jealousy. The *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic narrate clearly that "the wicked are never satisfied." The mind is the centre of every action. It has to be cultured to avoid this, wickedness without which no good action is possible. A man with wicked mind, however affluent he be, can never get peace of mind. The *Mahabharata* noted "A heart full of hate can

know no contentment. Hate is a cruel fire which extorts the fuel on which it lives and grows." (*Ibid*, p. 133)

All sages and seers of ancient and modern India from all religions have realised the Secret of God-realisation as the keynote where they are all unanimous in their supreme conclusion that the main object of all devotional experiments would be exploring Truth. Truth will be the main target of all devotional activities. Shadow of Truth sometimes may come in the form of *Maya*, hallucination that deters progress. A real seeker of God must be careful against this hallucination. That was the greatest message of Bhagwan Shankaracharya. He guarded all against this transitory *Maya*. The life is transitory just like a dew drop on the leaf of the Lotus plant. It glitters brightly but is absolutely meaningless. It leads one to nowhere. Lust for life, for carnal appetite, for wealth, women and even relations are mere myths. The only Truth will be God-realisation; everything else a mere myth—*Jagat mithya*, even the Universe is a myth.

Thousands of Saints and sages after spending their whole lives in the dark caves in the Himalayas got the same enlightenment that the world is just a playground, it is a big stage for drama, the real citadel is one's own heart, which is the dwelling place of the Universal Father.

The greatest secret of Indian philosophy is hidden in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, where the sage, noted *Satyameva jayate na nritan* "Truth alone succeeds, not untruth. By truthfulness the path of felicity is opened up, the path which is taken by the sages, freed from cravings, and which leads them to Truth's eternal abode."

Truth, means fight against injustice, against all sorts of oppression, against wrong actions; even if the forces be strong or large in number, a truthful man must stand up and raise his voice.

This has been the core of all codes of conduct on which rest the mighty edifice of Indian culture. Lies which are shadows of truth, are always detected and once you tell a lie, to substantiate that you have to multiply lies. Lies weaken one's spiritual power. Only to keep the promise of his father

and save him from telling a lie, in the great epic *Ramayana*, Sri Ramachandra had on his own, undergone a life of banishment in forest for 12 years. But there also Truth Succeeded—His younger Brother Bharata, for whom the step mother conspired and got the promises made by King Dasaratha, refused to sit on the throne. He kept his *Paduka* (wooden Sandal) on the throne and ruled Ayodhya by proxy. After the expiry of the tenure of banishment, Sri Ramachandra sat on the throne.

Similarly, King Yudhisthira, of the epic *Mahabharata*, has been described as an incarnation of truthfulness. It has been recorded that he never told a lie, except once and that too only partially, when it was necessary as a war strategy. He had to say that Aswathama was dead. In fact, that was the name of an elephant. He was forced by his advisors to say *Asvathama hata iti gaja*. *Iti gaja*, meant the elephant which he had only whispered quietly so that none could hear it distinctly. Even for uttering this half a lie, his entry to the heaven had been checked for a moment.

Truth gives tremendous strength of mind. It is said if a man can pass only six days without telling a single lie, whatever he says on the seventh day onwards become true. But, in modern circumstances and surroundings, it would be a very difficult an experiment. A man by this experiment becomes *baack siddha*. That could be the reason why great Saints kept silence for days and months and even years. You could avoid telling unnecessary things. *Shaik Muinuddin Chisti* too guided his disciples to talk less. In modern days, Ma Anand—mayee insisted on a day for *Mouni* or a day of Silence.

A very important aspect of Indian Culture is the ethical code of conduct as propounded and presented in the holy scriptures. One must do good work. One must do hard work to live happily. *Shram eva jayate*—only hard work pays in the long run.

But more importantly come the philosophy of *Karma*. According to the *Upanishads*, "According as a man acts and walks in the path of life, so he becomes. He that does good becomes good he that does evil becomes evil. By pure actions he becomes pure; by evil actions he becomes evil."

The *Upanishads* clearly give the guideline by observing "And they say in truth that a man is made of desire. As his desire is, so is his faith. As his faith is, so are his works. As his works are, so he becomes. It was said in the verse.

A man comes with his actions to

The end of his determination

Reaching the end of the journey begun by his works on earth, from that world, a man returns to this world of human action.

Thus far for the man who lives under desire. The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* gives a clearer and easier interpretation and simpler guideline. If one has to have vision, God-realization, wants to explore Truth and be enlightened he must leave everything. Renunciation there, has been enunciated as the noble only path to joy of life. A life which has no desire, lust or attachment is of the highest order and gets more easily nearer Truth. That is the greatest Truth of all philosophies. There lies the real key to Secret of Indian way of Cheer of life—a state of limitless joy, an estatic condition of mind where everything becomes nearer, dearer and all earthly malices, jealousies, myths, hatred vanish. Even a housholder can practise this experiment. The greatest example was King Janaka who was a successful ruler at the same time an enlightened sage.

For peace and proper enlightenment the great *Sufi* Saints too prescribed the same path—path of renunciation. Summing up the main teachings of Sufism, a great Scholar—who too joined monkhood later, wrote "The corner stone of Sufism are on one side for perfect renunciation and on the other for total absorption of God."

How to get to this state? After detachment from everything the *Sufi* devotes himself to deep "meditation, "contemplation and repetition of the (Holy) Name of the Lord. This, all pathfinders, belonging to different religions observe must be done with "the spirit of perfect humility and with fervency of heart."

The *Sufis* will tell you "This practice of the *Sufi*—*Zikr* grows by the *tawajjah* (attention coupled with grace) of the

Murshid (Teacher) and in his *muwagba* (contemplation) he actually perceives the *Reality, Truth, God*. This union and absorption of the emanation (soul of individual) in its Essence (God), after divesting itself of all worldly encumbrances and ultimately body consciousness of the subtlest kind (the Ego) is the goal of the *Sufi*, and when reached he enjoys intuitions, transports and ecstasies all the time. Whilst thus living in God, he is practically dead to the affairs of the world."

(Bankay Behari : *Sufis, Mystics and Yogis*, p. 71)

The salient aspects of the Sufi life are five :

1. *Sabr* (Patience), *fana* (annihilation), *raza* (satisfaction), *tawakul* (contentment)
2. *Tauhid* (unity consciousness)
3. *Wajd* (Ecstasy)
4. *Ishq* (Love)
5. *Maghfirat* (Grace, forgiveness).

A detailed study of both *Sufism* and *Upanishads* or Yoga would clearly show how both the great systems of thoughts acted and interacted, may be even unconsciously. William James suggested that in India, training in mystical insight has been known from time immemorial under the name of Yoga. Yoga means "the experimental Union of individual with the divine" and it helped *Sufism* to flourish, offering a paternal caress. The result of this contact was that all the principles of *Sufism* of Persia and Iran modified by the Yoga and Occultism of India, gave a similar form to *Sufism*."

MAN IS THE HIGHEST TRUTH

In the *Mahabharata* the greatest stress was on man. There can be no truth above man. That was the highest truth. So to attain real peace this man, the hero has to be taken care of. That was the truth expressed by the great Buddha. Immediately after his enlightenment Mahamati Buddha addressed his first five disciples. There too he asked his disciples to dedicate their lives in the service of humanity. In his historic first sermon the *Light of Asia* and the symbol of World Peace, Lord Buddha said, *Bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya*. He said the message of this love for mankind must spread from man

and knowledge too from man to man, as light spread from lamp to lamp.

Mahavira, the founder of Jainism gave the message of *Ahimsa*, Non-Violence. Through the message of love and peace of Lord Buddha and the message of *Ahimsa* of Lord Mahavira, India had conquered about half the world, a historic event, never done or even dreamt by any other civilisation of the world.

Guru Nanak Dev's Sikh religion is also based on the first brick of *Kar Seva* i.e. Service to humankind. Humility, love for mankind are the main messages of all the Sikh Gurus.

So the messages of peace, as earlier depicted and experimented through spiritual experiences of the earlier and modern sages, all in one capsule, lead, to use one word—LOVE. This love for humankind has been expressed by the great Saints like Chaitanya as *Prem*, the Sufis expressed it as *dard*, the Christian Saints like St. Thomas advocated and propagated *compassion*, Lord Buddha advocated *maitri*—love and fellow feeling, Sri Ramakrishna directed Vivekananda to serve all human beings as manifestations of God—*Jiva is Shiva*, Man is God. That has been key to World Peace.

RENUNCIATION KEY TO PEACE

The *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* in substance suggested renunciation as the key to peace. *Tyagat sukham anantaram*. It was only from renunciation that one can derive peace of mind. All the pains, sufferings and miseries are due to lust and endless desire.

The *Gita* derived this key to peace from the *Upanishads* and the *Upanishads* derived it from the *Vedas*.

Happily the advent of Islam took this idea further ahead. Islam preached universal brotherhood of man. The Sufi's too interchanged their experiments in exploring Truth.

All the great Sufi Saints in India, who influenced and enriched Indian cultural heritage substantially believed in this spirit of renunciation. Right from Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti, Baba Farid, Shaikh Baktiar Kaki, Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia

were the epitome of selfless service and led lives exactly similar to those of the ancient sages and seers of India.

They were offered royal gifts many times but, in keeping with the Indian tradition of ancient sages, they declined the royal offers and led lives of simplicity and austerity. They had wider visions. Both Hindu and Muslim admirers were welcome and the saints gave them spiritual guidance. Their great sympathy for the poor and lives of austerity made them so popular with the masses—both the Hindus and the Muslims that even the emperors of India became jealous of them. The case of Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia's digging water ponds at night by voluntary workers (who were forbidden by royal order not to do it during day time) is proverbial. They taught the ordinary men to serve man in a simple way. That was their way to lead the world to peace.

The eternal Truth of Indian philosophy as truly reflected in Indian culture is peace which can be attained through service to humankind. A great scholar, deeply drenched in Indian philosophy and culture rightly observed about treatment, to man the hero of this peace. He wrote, "A flower can be an object of trade, something to buy and sell for money. This is the lowest value. It can also be an object of intellectual interest, but then it becomes an abstraction and from a purely intellectual point of view a nettle may sometimes be more interesting than a flower. But to the soul, the flower is an object of joy, and to the poet it can be a thing of Beauty and Truth." A window from which we may look in wonder into the Beauty and Truth of the Universe and the Truth and Beauty in our own souls. Blake saw this when he wrote.

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower
Hold Infinity into the palm of your hand,
and Eternity in an hour."

That has been Truth. That has been Beauty. That has been Peace. That has been the story of Indian Culture. That, in a nutshell and in the words of the great Indian Saint, who preached and practised in his own lifetime and with perfec-

tion and precision, all the major religious faiths on earth would be service to man. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa said *Jiva is Shiva*, Man is God. Service to man is Service to God. That has been the quintessence of Indian philosophy that represented all the faiths. There lay also the seed of World peace.

After all who is this man, the hero of all activities ? The *Prasna Upanishad*, observed "Man is composed of such elements as vital wealth, deeds, thought, and the senses—all of them deriving their being from the Self. They have come out of the Self, and in the Self they ultimately disappear—even as the waters of a river disappear in the Sea !"

KEY TO PEACE BY UPANISHAD

What do we need for a right way of living that which can lead the world to peace ? The sum and substance of the ancient sages as transmitted through the *Taittiriya Upanishad* give reply to that eternal question. Raising this basic question itself, it also gave the reply. The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, observes

"What is needful

Righteousness, and sacred learning and teaching,

Truth, and sacred learning and teaching

Meditation and sacred learning and teaching

Self control, and sacred learning and teaching

Peace, and sacred learning and teaching,

Ritual, and sacred learning and teaching,

Humanity, and sacred learning and teaching,

It noted finally

Satyavacas, the Truthful, says : "Truth".

Taponitya, the Austere, says : Austerity

But *Naka*, who is beyond pain says : Learning and teaching,

For they are austerity, for they are austerity,"

The Supreme teaching of the eternal values of Indian sages as expressed in the *Upanishads* is shaking off of desire. It says "in time that a man is made of desire. As his desire is so

is his faith. As his faith is, so are his works. As his works are, so he becomes." It has been said in the original verse "A man comes with his actions to the end of his determination."

Finally, the *Upanishads* give you the key to peace. It says, "He who is free from desire, whose desire finds fulfilment, since the Spirit is his desire, the powers of life leave him not. He becomes one with *Brahman*, the Spirit and enters into the Spirit." In an excellent thrilling verse, the *Upanishad* says.

"When all desires that cling to the heart disappear, then a mortal becomes immortal, and even in this life attains liberation."

IMPACT OF MAHABHARATA ON LIFE AND LITERATURE ON WORLD PEACE

The great Epic *Mahabharata* left its deep imprint not only on the lives and literature in India but it definitely left a deep imprint in world thinking and influence on Human Civilisation. As C. Rajagopalachari happily recorded, "The realities of life are identified by genius and given the closely form that makes drama, poetry or great prose. Since literature is closely related to life, so long as the human family is divided into nations, literature cannot escape the effects of such divisions. But the highest literature transcends regionalism and through it, when we are properly attuned, we realise the essential oneness of the human family. The *Mahabharata* is of this class. It belongs to the world and not only to India."

As Swami Vivekananda reminded a big crowd in California long ago (in 1900) the *Mahabharata* and its quintessence the *Gita* left its imprint deeply in the American life and political thought. He told them how Emerson got his inspiration from the *Gita* which he had received from Carlyle who made a present of the holy scripture to him when he met him. Out of the thoughts of the *Gita* which formed part of the *Mahabharata* came out the Concord Movement which played a great role in the life and thinking of America.

Virtue is not the end but the indispensable means to the knowledge of divine reality. Bhagwan Sankaracharya, the

greatest of the Indian commentators on the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, which is part and parcel of the *Mahabharata*, holds the view that Truth is the last end for the entire universe and the contemplation of Truth is the chief occupation of wisdom. "Right action is the way to knowledge ; for it purifies the mind, and it is only to a mind purified from egotism that the intuition of the Divine Ground can come.

Introducing the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* to the world of thinkers who are interested in the movement on peace, Aldous Huxley wrote, "the Perennial Philosophy and its ethical corollaries constitute a Highest Common Factor, present in all the major religions of the World. To affirm this Truth has never been more imperatively necessary than at the present time. There will never be enduring peace unless and until human beings come to accept a philosophy of life more adequate to the cosmic and psychological facts than the insane idolatries of nationalism and the advertising man's apocalyptic faith in progress towards a mechanized New Jerusalem."

Huxley wrote, "it is perfectly possible for people to remain good Christians, Hindus, Buddhists or Moslems and yet to be united in full agreement on the basic doctrines of the Perennial Philosophy. The *Bhagavad Gita* is perhaps the most systematic scriptural statement of the perennial philosophy. To a world at war a world that, because it lacks the intellectual and spiritual prerequisites to peace, can only hope to patch up some kind of precarious armed truce, it stands pointing already and unmistakably, to the only road to escape from the Self imposed necessity of self destruction." So Huxley welcomed the latest version of *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood which, he was convinced can play a vital role in the thought process of those engaged in a new effort for World Peace. One could readily recall Sri Aurobindo's prophetic statement on the eternal existence of India's basic culture. "One might describe Greek or Roman Civilisation" Where they will miss the lofty principle illumined with a striking and uplifting idea of individual manhood and its powers and its possible perfection. They missed this main target but Indian Civilisation

was not only a cultural system, but an immense religious effort of the human spirit."

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 137)

BUDDHA AND MAHAVIRA'S MESSAGE OF PEACE

Lord Buddha's message of peace and Lord Mahavira's message of *Ahimsa* or Non Violence have played a unique role not only in the Cultural History of India but have left their permanent mark in the history of civilisation. Both have today, and for centuries to come, will have relevance to world culture and specially to those who are actively working for peace. Their messages have in fact been the guiding forces behind the world wide movement for peace. Both Will Durant and Arnold Toynbee have recorded this unique feature of Indian Culture. "The Buddha and Mahavira," wrote Toynbee were each offering a way of winning release from sorrowful round of re-birth that in the sixth century. B.C. was believed to be potentially endless by most schools of thought in India and by Pythagoreans and Orphics in the Hellenic world. The common source of this belief may have been the religion of the Eurasian pastoral nomad people who had erupted out of the Steppe in a number of different directions in the Sixth and Seventh centuries B.C.

(Toynbee Arnold : *The Mankind and Mother Earth*, p. 223)

ZEND AVESTA

Parsis are part and parcel of Indian Cultural mainstream. Their holy scripture *Avesta* charts a clear cut guideline for leading a pure life and create a better understanding between man and man. Very much like the *Vedas*, the *Avesta* teaches everyone to devote some time to the service of fellow men and society. The main theme of *Zend Avesta* has been the stress on moral values of human life.

The main theme of *Avesta viz.*, good thoughts, good words good deeds should be the motto of international organisations, dedicated to the cause of welfare and upliftment of mankind and world peace.

Zend Avesta is regularly recited in all Indian National festivals and ceremonies. The life and message of Zarathustra

should be taught to all students, both humanities and science. It will facilitate^a in their decision making. They will think twice before doing something against justice and moral ethics. A keen sense of fellow feeling, mutual understanding, aspiration for peace are the inspiring messages of *Zend Avesta*. This message represents Indian Culture and daily prayers repeated in prayer halls should be repeated in other forums as well and the translated versions be available so that people may know the message of the Messiah who lived and died for human upliftment.

There is hardly any country in the world today which has the sacred and secret wisdom of Peace as India. It is indeed even physically not possible for any single individual to go through all these great masterpieces and absorb them. Right from the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the epics like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas*, messages of great Saints like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Nanak, Ram-ananda, Kabir, Dadu, Shankara Deva, Narsi Mehta, Ravidas, Meera and a host a great many souls have unfolded the Secret of Peace. In our own modern days Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Ramana Maharshi, Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Aurobindo have clearly shown the path of peace.

The great messages of the Buddha, Mahavir, Nanakdevji (as depicted and followed up by additions) *Guru Granth Sahibji*, the Holy Bible, the message of the Holy Quran, specially as explained in a simpler style by the Sufi Saints show us the exalted path of peace.

What is needed is a cultural synthesis of these great words of wisdom, integration and understanding. Each is searching and exploring Peace through experiment. Each is correct. Only the mind, which is the centre of all activities will have to be properly cultured and trained.

The synthesis of this great message of Peace has been described by no less a person than Poet Rabindranath Tagore. In his great vision of unity of Mankind confirmed in *Towards Universal Man*. Tagore in his inimitable masterly style has

summed up the quintessence of Indian Culture and her message to World Peace. Tagore wrote : India has an answer to the global conflicts and dissensions. He said that right from the days of *Rig Veda* India has been pleading for world unity and peace. India stood for friendship with all—*Vasudhoibo Kutumbakam*. The whole world *Vasudha*, has been her relation. In the same breath Tagore described, “He who sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings, he does not remain unrevealed”. Several decades ago Tagore observed, “I deeply hope that our educational centres should be the meeting ground of the East and West. In the world of material gain, human beings have neither stopped fighting, nor will they easily do so. But there are no obstacles to their meeting in the field of cultural exchange.”

(Tagore, Rabindranath : *Towards Universal Man*, p. 250)

This has been a unique approach to the mission of World Peace. Tagore was convinced that unity of mankind would be more easily attained through education rather than through anything else. Knowledge is power. It is more powerful than all the hydrogen and atom bombs put together. It is only through knowledge that one understands a thing better. It is only through knowledge a mind gets enlightened. A cultured mind leads one to the highest stage of man. Once one reaches that stage his heart is full of love. Malice, lust, hatred, jealousy the very antithesis of peace vanish. This cultural unity, would be the only way to usher in harmony and World Peace.

VEDANTA IN PRACTICE

Through the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement spread all over the world, India is spreading the immortal message of *Vedanta*. Buddha's message of dedicating the lives in the service of man—*bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya*—has been the main motto of thousands of dedicated monks and householders who are carrying the message of service. Swami Vivekananda, the most dynamic monk of India who shook the whole world and challenged the West for its narrow materialistic outlook—and this he did in the midst of the intellectuals in their very soil in the West, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's

messaae—*Jiva is Shiva* (Service to man is service to God) is the fittest translation of the Vedantic ideas into practice. Indeed the life of Sri Ramakrishna, who is the only saint to have experimented all the major religious thoughts in the world and came to the conclusion "There are various faiths in the world. As many faiths so many paths, But every one thinks his faith alone to be the right one, that his own watch alone is going right."

Sri Ramakrishna has been very personification of synthesis of Indian culture. He represented the lofty ideals that all the Indian holy scriptures have to offer. And yet when Swami Vivekananda suggested to him the ambition of his life as God-realisation through deep meditation through *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, transcended deep meditation, the saint of Dakshinewar just rebuked him. "You mean to say you have nothing else to give to the world? You are interested only in your own personal spiritual salvation? My dear son, you have a great role to play". The *Vedanta* had to be shown to the world as a living keynote to better human understanding. That was possible only through service to mankind—irrespective of one's caste, creed, nationality and sex. That would be the highest conception of all the religious scriptures, of all faiths in different languages in India. "Service to man" said Sri Ramakrishna and "Giving dignity to man with humility", said Mahaprabhu Sri Chaitanya. "A man must be as humble as a blade of grass, must give due dignity to his fellow being, must be as tolerant as a tree, must always think of God" said Chaitanya Deva is the only way to Peace.

(*Trinadapi Sunichena Taroribo Sahisnuna Amanina
Manadena Kirtaniya Sada Hari*)

Guru Nanak Devji also said the same thing. He laid the greatest stress on service to mankind. Zarathustra, in *Zend Vesta* repeated the same thing. In the *Mahabharata*, the highest dignity has been assigned to man. "Man is the greatest Truth and there is nothing, no Truth higher than man," Chandidas only echoed the voice of the *Mahabharata*.

The whole activities of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement, therefore centre round, only in the service to the

needy, the destitutes, to the illiterate, to the ignorant. The two hundred centres of the Vedanta societies throughout the world are preaching this only Truth. This is a novel way of bringing better understanding among so many varieties of faiths together and nearer. *Nara Narayana*. *Narayana* in every man was the secret of Sri Ramakrishna's life long spiritual experiment. Not only restricted or rigid about any particular faith, this great saint himself was an incarnation of love and love to man.

In the words of the Sufi Saints—*dard*, in the words of Lord Christ—*compassion*, in the words of Chaitanya—*Prem*, in the words of Buddha the Enlightened One, *maitreya*. The have been the messages of Indian culture, the most ancient and yet so youthful civilisation in the world. Love has throughout been the keynote to World Peace.

THE UNDYING SOUL OF INDIAN CULTURE

To sum up, one should not foreget that the major role of culture is improvement by mental or physical training, an intellectual development. The perception must be fully sprouted and vision made wider. It must contribute to the development of human civilisation. There can be no development, mental or socio economic or ethical and moral, without peace. Only a happy mind can look forward to making a new social order. That has been the reason why Indian philosophers insist on eternal bliss of mind—*Sachchidananda*.

In his *Foundation of Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo clearly enunciated. "A true happiness in this world is the right terrestrial aim of man, and true happiness lies in the finding and maintenance of a natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A culture is to be valued to the extent to which it has discovered the right key of this harmony and organised its expressive motives and movements. And a civilisation must be judged by the manner in which all its principles, ideas, forms, ways of living, work to bring that harmony out, manage its rhythmic play and secure its continuance or the development of its motives. A civilisation in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like modern European Culture,

predominantly mental and intellectual like the old Graeco—Roman or predominantly spiritual like the still persistent culture of India. India's Central conception is that of the Eternal, the spirit here encased in matter, involved and immanent in it, and evolving on the material plane by rebirth of the individual up the scale of being till, in mental man, it enters the world of ideas and realm of conscious morality, *Dharma*."

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 47)

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18

The Secret of Immortality of Indian Culture

Against the backdrop of all the great civilisations of ancient world it would be interesting to compare and contrast the Indian culture and heritage. How is it that great ancient civilisations of Egypt, The Mesopotomian (Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian), Greek thoughts of ancient days, the great Roman civilisation—all have receded into the background. Undoubtedly they have their ancient heritage but those glorious thoughts are now only read in the pages of history whereas Indian cultural heritage is still alive and vibrant. The only changes that have taken place are additions and alterations to the lofty thoughts suiting the changing requirements of modern society.

The key to the success story and immortality of the Indian culture lay in the knowledge that religious faiths which formed part and parcel of Indian culture has been the fruit of enlightened knowledge. They were not borrowed from mere books or pages of history. It bore the impress of supreme divinity.

Another factor of importance has been the realisation that peaceful life could be achieved by way of co-existence.

RISE AND FALL OF EGYPTIAN CIVILISATION

How is it that the Egyptian civilisation, as old as at least five thousand years decayed finally? It was one of the most ancient civilisations of the world. This civilisation grew and developed on the bank of the river Nile. In fact the Egyptian civilisation itself was described as the gift of Nile. People settled there because of the fertility of the land. They came from Nubia, Ethiopia and Libya. Important rulers/Emperors and their successors had developed art and sculpture which gave us ideas about civilisation that existed during 3000 B. C. Earliest pyramids were built by them. After the Menes dynasty came the rule of the Pharaohs who were deeply respected by the people of Egypt as their saviour not only in this life but also life after death! The earliest of this civilised people believed that their emperors were immortal. They preserved their bodies after death. Many beautiful tombs were built to mummify the dead bodies of the Pharaohs. The biggest of the tomb of a Pharaoh (2600 B C.) took 4 million people to work for ten years, mostly on a voluntary religious basis. The temples and pyramids show how once Egyptian civilisation flourished with deep spiritual moorings. The Great Sphinx and some of the stone statues in temples of Egypt also showed how architecture developed in ancient Egypt. They also clearly reflected the deep religious thoughts of ancient Egypt. There were many god heads in the temples but Emperor Amenhopet IV ventured to concentrate all his subjects to only one God—The Sun God but his people finally rejected it. For this even his dead body was discredited. They believed in transmigration of soul. Priests were highly honoured sect. The mummies of some of the Pharaohs can be seen even today after thousands of years. The Pharaohs were not only the rulers of the kingdom, they were also heads of the religious bodies. Besides the Sun God known as *Ra* God of Nile *Osiris* was equally respected. It has been recorded, "Egyptian civilisation, at the height of its glory and honour, was one of the most advanced civilisations of the world. This civilisation, however saw a quick decay and disintegration."

This ancient civilisation went into the background in 30 BC when Egypt went under the Romans' and again the Muslims in 640 A.D.

THE SUMERIAN CIVILISATION

A contemporary of the Egyptian civilisation was the equally important Mesopotamian civilisation. As the Egyptian civilisation grew and developed on the bank of the river Nile, the Mesopotamian civilisation grew and flourished on the bank of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. It is believed that the art of writing first got introduced before it was known to the Egyptians. It was known as Sumeria, and the Sumerian civilisation flourished in 3000 B.C.

The Sumerians were religious. Temples were the sacred prayer spots. They were methodical in keeping accounts. The Babylonians did not shine much in art and architecture like the Egyptians.

The fertile crescent, as the land was described, was invaded frequently for its prosperous economy. So there were many halts in the progress of the Mesopotamian civilisation which was a combination of Sumerian civilisation, the Babylonian civilisation, and Assyrian civilisation. To quote Will Durant, "The early history of Mesopotamia is in one aspect the struggle of the non-semitic people of Sumeria to preserve their independence against the expansion and inroads of the semetics from Kish and Agade and other centres in the north."

The Sumerians were well versed in science. They were highly cultured, lived decently and like the Aryans were worshippers of Nature. They had many gods like the Egyptians. *Ishtar*, God of fertility was most respected. The temples had high income as gifts. They believed in reincarnation and like *Shakti* worship in some parts of India, animal sacrifice was common to please God. The beautiful temple in Nippur was dedicated to God *Enlil*.

Sumerian civilisation's greatest gift to the world has been the art of writing. Paper was yet to be invented. So writing was done on clay tablets. Writing was first introduced by

3000 B.C. Sumeria had a fairly good library of literature dating 2700 B.C., A library discovered recently had preserved 30000 clay tablets containing "folk songs, legends, myths, songs and dirges." War chariots were first introduced by Sumerians.

Will Durant has noted, "Civilisations both in the East and in the West borrowed elements from Mesopotamian civilisation."

In many respects the Sumerian civilisation was a pioneer. To quote again Will Durant, "The Sumerians had the first States and Empires, the first irrigation, the first use of gold and silver as standards of value, the first extensive development of writing, the first arch, column, vault and dome."

THE CHINESE CIVILISATION

Very much like the history of hoary Indian past, the history of Chinese civilisation has not been exactly traced date wise. It is deemed as one of the oldest civilisations of the world. We have records only from 1500 B.C. The Chinese civilisation developed and flourished on the bank of Yangtze Kiang in the centre, Hwang Ho in the north and Sikiang in the south.

Available records suggest that it was during the reign of the strong ruler Lu Hsi in 2852 B.C. under whose rule Chinese civilisation began to spread. Music was quite popular. Marriage Codes were there. Education was respected. It got further developed under the rule of Shen Nung (2737-2295 B.C.). Wooden Ploughs were invented during his rule. Huang Ti (2697-2590 B.C.) however was considered the first important emperor under whose rule China flourished culturally and economically and contributed much to world civilisation. Many temples and community halls led to social integration. Culture and civilisation had a steady growth under the different dynasties like Hsia dynasty, Shang Dynasty, Chou dynasty, Chin dynasty, Hans and Tangs.

In the realm of art and aesthetics music got well developed. Violin was introduced. People got entertained by magic and folk dances. In the field of religion, Taoism was popular side

by side with Confucianism. Local religions varied. Dead forefathers were worshipped. Buddhism was welcomed first in ancient China.

Beautiful Pagodas were constructed. The great Saint philosopher Confucious (551 B.C.) born in a noble family in Lu State wanted to spread the message of peace. By 17, Confucious who lost his father at a young age, got known for his vast knowledge like Shankaracharya. He was married but preferred to be a roving preacher. He was popular as a spiritual preceptor. He had taught personally at least 4000 students. He was invited to become a Minister but could not continue for long. He died at 72. Among his scholarly works mention must be made of Record of Rights, Book of changes, The Book of History, The Book of Poetry, Spring and Autumn, The Book of Mencius, Middle Path, The Great Learning and Meng Ju Shu.

Confucious was convinced that every problem has also its solution. The approach should be humane. "We should feel our responsibility towards others, be just, wise and have faith in others. According to him our simple living can give more pleasure to the family. A good man should not only look after his own welfare but should also care for the welfare of humanity as a whole." The contribution of Confucius has been quite substantial. He laid the greatest stress on moral values. Confucius noted, "Only those persons can improve who sincerely go for the search of knowledge. It is essential that every good person should have self assessment from time to time. A good person should think himself as friend of all and foe of none". Confucius felt "man is the unit of human society." Therefore it was "essential to reform him. He did not believe in the philosophy of other world." He was convinced that none has time in this world to think about the other world.

The Chinese civilisation was most influenced by Confucious. It was he who taught the Chinese and the world at large to respect the cultural heritage of a society. He stressed the unique importance of discipline even in Government and the general masses of people. That was the only way to have

permanent peace. China, under his influence became proud of its cultural heritage. Finally, because of this China got isolated because it stopped mixing with other cultures of the world. "Since times immemorial the Chinese have deep faith and pride in their own civilisation. They have always regarded their own civilisation as the best civilisation in the world. They have always thought that the other civilisations were to borrow from them and that they had nothing to borrow from other civilisations. Accordingly the Chinese decided to develop their civilisation in isolation."

Things however took a turn when in the first century B.C. Buddhism penetrated deeply into China.

Chinese people proudly take the credit of being the pioneer in the realm of printing. *Diamond Sutra* is the oldest printed book. Like Sumerian and Egyptian patterns writing was pictographic. There were as many as 40,000 pictographic letters. Literature was popular or restricted only to the nobility. China followed a lunar calendar and introduced numeration.

Like any other ancient civilisation the Chinese people believed in Nature worship, the objects venerated being mainly the rivers, mountains and stars. They had great respect for the spirits whom they worshipped like gods. Offerings were made for the dead spirits. *The Great Chinese Wall*, a proof of perfect knowledge of architecture and design and art of construction was built in the third century B.C. It is 1500 miles long, 23 feet high and 20 ft. broad.

The Chinese people followed established rituals religiously.

The main religions were Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism.

Taoism was introduced by Laotze. It is still a popular faith in China. The founder was a learned scholar—author of *The way of Life*—hailing from Honan. He was born in 604 BC. It is a "mystical religion." According to Taoism "true religious objects can be attained through virtue, compassion, humility and Non-Violence." "Violence defeats its own ends."

“Life and death are two aspects of human life. Like nature, all the people should do everything possible and perform their duties very sincerely and honestly. Every wise person should be respected who in turn should try to find peace.”

Mencius was equally popular during 377 B.C. and 188 B.C. He was more or less a follower of Confucius. “All men by nature are good,” he proclaimed. Social evils are results of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty and all the three must be removed.

Mencius hated war because “it destroyed human civilisation and retarded progress.” He prescribed religious thoughts should be well known to those who run administration.

The Chinese civilisation is one of the oldest in the world. It has a history of at least 7000 years.

Buddhism became a popular faith. Even today one has to refer to Chinese references to write any authentic book on the Buddha.

Although it was popularised in China by the Emperor in the first century B.C., I Tsing, Huan Tsang and Fa Hien illustrated how Buddhism had spread in China side by side with India in the sixth century B.C.

THE GREEK CIVILISATION

The ancient Greek Civilisation has enriched world civilisation in many ways. They had quite a close nexus with the Aryans, of which they formed a constituent component. They got settled in Greece in 2000 B.C.

The ancient cultural history of Greece has been immortalised by two great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* written by the world famous poet Homer who was blind.

The most outstanding feature of ancient Greek civilisation had been the role of democracy. “In Athenian democracy there was faith in the ability and capacity of the people. All people could hold any office.

The Greek civilisation produced some of the greatest thinkers in the world. Socrates till today is considered as the wisest of all scholars ever born on earth. Socrates was eager "to find truth and rationale of everything, instead of taking everything for granted".

He was perhaps a single scholar whose whole life was dedicated "in search of wisdom and in finding the principle of truth and justice which should be permanent to guide the mankind." He was put to death for his utterances against the traditional faiths.

His disciple Plato (428-347 BC) was a broken hearted but spirited philosopher who wrote his immortal book *Republic* where he has categorised society into workers, soldiers and philosophers. He believed that all children were assets of the State and it was the duty of the State to bring them up.

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato. He insisted that "every argument should be tested on reason before that was accepted." All the three great learned philosophers contributed to whole world civilisation with their new thoughts on systematised knowledge. Greece introduced the Olympic Games in 776 BC.

Recalling Renan, Will Durant observed, "Socrates gave philosophy to mankind, and Aristotle gave it science. There was philosophy before Socrates and Science before Aristotle, and since Socrates and since Aristotle, philosophy and science have made immense advances. But all has been built upon foundation which they laid. Before Aristotle, science was in embryo, with him it was born."

(Durant, Will : *The Story of Philosophy* p. 62)

Aristotle unlike Socrates, would find fault with almost all his predecessors. In his advancement of Learning Bacon rightly observed, "Aristotle, after the Ottoman manner thought he could not reign secure without putting all his brethren to death."

(Bacon : *Advancement of Learning*, Book III, Chapter IV)

Unfortunately, he too proved wrong on many occasions. For instance, Aristotle rejected the views of Pythagoras that

"the sun is the centre of our system." He preferred to give the honour to the earth. This is basically proved to be wrong. Will Durant in his *The Story of Philosophy* observed, "Indeed, Aristotle makes as many mistakes as possible for a man who is founding the science of biology."

Divine Providence coincided completely for Aristotle "with the operation of natural causes." God moves the world as the beloved object moves the lover.

(Aristotle : *Metaphysics*)

To him God is the final cause of nature, the drive and purpose of things, the form of the world; the principle of its life, the sum of its vital processes and powers, the inherent goal of its growth, energizing entelachy of the whole."

(*Ibid*)

The God of Aristotle does not do anything. "He has no desires, no will, no purpose; his activity so pure that he never acts. He is absolutely perfect; therefore he cannot desire any thing; therefore he does nothing."

Aristotle's God only contemplated on himself. "His only occupation is to contemplate the essence of things; and since himself is the essence of all things the form of all forms, his sole employment is the contemplation of himself."

Ironically Will Durant comments, "Poor Aristotalian God ! he is a *roi faineant*, a do nothing king; the king reigns, but he does not rule. No wonder the British like Aristotle, his God is obviously copied from their king."

(Durant, Will : *The Story of Philosophy* pp. 71-72)

Aristotle was extremely popular. Young men with great curiosity for fresh ideas used to throng his discourse. "As Aristotle developed and young men crowded about him to be taught and formed more and more his mind turned from the details of science to the larger problem of conduct or character." Instead of vaguer perhaps mystic would have been a better tribute to the philosopher.

Aristotle convincingly announced, "the aim of life is not goodness for its own sake, but happiness. For we choose

happiness for itself, and never with a view to anything further; whereas we choose honour, pleasure, intellect because we believe that through them we shall be made happy."

(Aristotle : *Ethics*)

Aristotle died in 322 B.C. a lonely man. As Durant narrated, "In the same year, and at the same age of sixty two, Demosthenes, greatest of Alexander's enemies, drank poison. Within twelve months Greece had lost her greatest ruler, her greatest orator, and her greatest philosopher. The glory that had been Greece faded now in the dawn of the Roman sun ; and the grandeur that was Rome was the pomp of power rather than the light of thought. Then that grandeur too decayed, that little light went almost out. For a thousand years darkness brooded over the face of Europe and all the world awaited the resurrection of philosophy."

(Durant Will : *The Story of Philosophy*, p. 95)

THE ROMAN CIVILISATION

The Roman civilisation was one of the most advanced civilisations of those days. In architecture, in law, in administration it had its original ideas and styles of functioning. By about 1000 B.C. Indo Europeans thronged from central Europe to settle down in Italy. Among them were also Sumerians, Umbrites and Latins. Some came even from Asia minor.

It must be noted that the Italians had hardly any contact with the Europeans or Greek people. They did not go out on trade activities. Their land was fertile enough to provide sufficient food.

Rome was founded by Romulus in 743 B.C. Roman civilisation has more records of war victories and conquerors than great thinkers and philosophers.

All important figures in Roman civilisation including Julius Caesar, Augustus, Constantine, Justinian were known for their valour and bravery.

It has been observed, "in art, science, philosophy, the Romans made few contributions of any distinctive merit but in law, military organisation, Government of different peoples

and other practical matters there have been few to equal them."

When the Roman civilisation had reached the pinnacle of its glory it was the most important centre of world culture. The saying even today, prevalent throughout the world is "Rome was not built in a day." It has become proverbial to say that every great work takes time to complete.

The greatest characters reflecting the valour and dash of a civilisation like that of Rome are even today subject matter for high literary pieces. Shakespeare had immortalised the valour of Julius Caesar. The main emphasis of the Roman civilisation was only materialistic. It had hardly anything special to contribute in the realm of philosophy. Indeed even today Rome is the headquarters for the Christian world. The Pope's palace and official residence known as Vatican houses the headquarters of the papal government. It is named after the hill in Rome which in Latin describes itself as *Vaticanus*.

A COMPARISON OF THOUGHTS—SIMILARITY AND CONTRASTS

The Indian culture and philosophical ideas of ancient India had many similarities and also contrasts with those of some of the most ancient civilisations of the world.

The most common factor is the situation of these ancient civilisations geographically. They sprouted and grew up only on the banks of major rivers of the land. The Egyptian civilisation flourished on the bank of the river Nile as the Indian civilisation flourished on the bank of Ganga. It also flourished on the banks of the rivers Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Sindu and Kaveri rivers. The Mesopotamian civilisation consisting of Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations flourished on the banks of the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The Chinese civilisation grew up and sprouted and blossomed on the banks of Yangtze Kiang in the centre, Hwang Ho in the north and Sikiang in the south.

The main reason for the major ancient civilisations skirting the rivers had been the fertility of the soil. The roaming

tribes wanted land to settle down where agriculture would be easy, land fertile and water easily available. There is another advantage also, viz. it is less susceptible to enemy attack.

It should be borne in mind always that a culture is greatly influenced by the climate. A man's mood, thoughts, feelings are affected in a large measure by the climatic and environmental conditions. A man on a river bank is more poetic normally than a man living near a desert. Not only the human feelings but also the spoken words undergo great changes. The phonetics of the same word vary due to climatic changes. For instance the word *Prastar* becomes harder *Patthhar* in an area near the mountains, it becomes *pathar* on the bank of the river. So in the cultural history of any civilisation, nature, specially the rivers, have a very major role to play.

SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

It is wrong to surmise that the Greek civilisation had first gifted the knowledge of science. As recorded by scholars "The Greeks systematised, generalised and theorised, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation, and experimental enquiry were altogether alien to the Greek temperament. Only in Hellenistic Alexandria was there any approach to scientific work conducted in the ancient classical world. What we call science arose in Europe as a new spirit of enquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks."

The spirit and those methods were introduced into European world by the Arabs."

(Iqbal : *The Six Lectures*)

In the sphere of Mathematics, it is known to the whole world that it was the Indian civilisation that invented and made full use of the decimal system.

The approach of scientific enquiry in Europe and Asia, particularly India had been brilliantly described by the modern

saint scholar Sri Aurobindo. He observed, "Its two significant characters are the cult of the inquiring, defining, effective, practical reason and the cult of life. The great high tides of European civilisation, Greek culture, the Roman world before Constantine, the Renaissance, the modern age with its two colossal idols, Industrialism and physical science, have come to the west on the strong ascending urge of this double force. Whenever this tide of powers has ebbed the European mind has entered into much confusion, darkness and weakness. Christianity failed to spiritualise Europe, whatever it might have done towards humanising it in certain ethical directions because it ran counter to these two master instincts; it denied the supremacy of the reason and put its anathema on a satisfied or strenuous fullness of life. But in Asia there has been neither this predominance of reason and the life cult nor any incompatibility of these two powers with the religious spirit. The great ages of Asia, the strong culmination of her civilisation and culture, in India the high Vedic beginning, the grand spiritual stir of the *Upanishads*, the wide flood of Buddhism, *Vedanta*, *Sankhya*, the *Puranic* and *Tantrik* religions, the flowering of *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* in the Southern kingdoms, have come in on a surge of spiritual light and a massive or intense climbing of the religious or religion - philosophic mind to its own heights, its noblest realities, its largest riches of vision and experience. It was in such periods that intellect, thought, poetry, the arts, the material life flowered into splendour. The ebbing of spirituality brought in, always on the contrary, the weakness of these other powers, periods of fossilisation or at least depression of the power of life, tracts of decline, even beginning of decay. This is a clue to which we have to hold if we would understand the great lines of divergence between the East and the West."

(Sri Aurobindo : *Foundations of Indian Culture*, p. 92)

CONCEPT AND CYCLE OF REBIRTH

A great common factor among all ancient civilisations had been the concept of rebirth. In India almost all great faiths — *Vedic*, *Upanishadic*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Buddhist*, the *Jainistic*, the *Zoroastrianist*,

the *Christians*, the *Sikhs*, the *Islamic*—believe in reincarnation of the soul depending on *Karma*.

The Egyptians “had deep faith in the transmigration of the soul. They believed that the soul was immortal. They also believed that each body will at one stage, get back its soul.” This was known as resurrection.

The Chinese, specially the Buddhists did believe in cycle of rebirth. Because of the tremendous influence of the Buddha, they too felt that unless desire was destroyed and the real goal of enlightenment reached a man will have to be born again and again.

This cycle of rebirth is the direct result of one's *Karma*.

So the main ancient civilisations did have some faith in reincarnation of the soul.

WORSHIPPERS OF NATURE

Another common factor among the ancient civilisations is the Nature worship. The entire *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* culture of ancient India had been advocating Nature worship. The sun, fire, are even today worshipped in India. The Egyptians had been worshippers of Nature. Sun God was the most popular of the objects of worship. Similarly in the Mesopotamian civilisation one can see the importance of Nature and Nature Gods.

The Chinese too were worshippers of Nature. They used to worship the rivers, the mountains, stars and spirits. It is very much like the Indian pattern where the first settlers, the Aryans used to worship *Indra*, *Varuna* and *Surya*. When they came to India they had no place of worship. They had no temples because in Nature worship one does not need a temple. They also worshipped *Agni* (Fire), *Prithvi* (the Earth). The (Nature) gods were considered as sources of strength and their worship was deemed desirable for meeting desires.”

The Aryans had tremendous faith in the theory of *Karma*.

A very important factor of the Aryan civilisation was the unanimous faith in one God, who was the most powerful. They used to chant hymns in his praise. The Aryans believed in Vedic rituals like performing sacrifices—The *yagnas*.

Varuna and *Indra* were worshipped by all. There are people who worship the Sun god even today without any special reforms made therefor.

Simple sacrifices were part of everyday life. It was worshipping God in his newer events and no function without propitiating the Fire, *Agni* Sacrifice. So the offering to the Fire God which is being followed religiously even today in all auspicious occasions. The Arya Samaj members do it every day.

The immortality of the spirit of Indian culture is the deep impact of the holy scriptures right from the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Quran*, the *Zend Avest*, the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the *Holy Bible*, the *Tripitaka*, the *Dhammapada*, the great sayings of *Mahavira*, the coordination of all the sects of the thoughts of different moorings by Bhagwan Shankaracharya, all of whom insisted on the same faithfulness of Truth, Purity and renunciation.

Indian culture is by and large, the story of peace and enlightened knowledge. Swami Vivekananda the dynamic monk insisted that harmony and assimilation and not dissention is the secret of Indian philosophy. The whole pattern of Indian culture, the synthesis of all highest thoughts from all religions was experimented by one great Saint Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa. In the history of world civilisation the appearance of such a great Saint of Dakshineswar is one of the most remarkable events. There never was such a spiritual experiment of synthesis of all religions by one single individual. Sri Ramakrishna in his own unique experience, after getting enlightenment, in all the religious faiths came to the conclusion that all were correct. *Jato math toto path*, as many thoughts, so many faiths. So why the question of clash? Where is the ground for any wrangle or fight? No doubt his life itself was a synthesis of Indian culture, the *Sanatan* Indian philosophy, which was eternal and the most ancient without any break. The thread of continuity has been the most brilliant feature of Indian culture. Swami Vivekananda described this Saint of Dakshineswar not only as the "greatest among the great" *Avatara Varisthaya* but also the symbol

of synthesis of all religions—*Sarvadharmā Samanyaya*. In this great synthesis—tolerance, co-existence, spirit of reincarnation—lies the secret of success of the continuity of ancient Indian culture laced with the latest touch of modernity.

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